



Participating in Medical Research Studies

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Participating in Medical Research Studies

When we hear news of the results of new medical research, we often do not think of the individuals who participated in the study. Whether it is a study about a particular treatment, a survey about the health conditions people experience, or a study that measures sleep patterns, researchers depend on individuals like you and those who are willing to volunteer to be part of these potentially important studies.

The February 7, 2001, issue of *JAMA* is dedicated to articles about opportunities for medical research.

THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH

Some things that will be explained to you before you decide to participate in a study include information about

- The purpose of the study
- Your rights as a participant, including your right not to participate in the study or to drop out of the study at any time
- Your duties as a participant in the study
- Any possible effects of the study, including potential benefits and risks involved in participating in the study—as part of this process you will be asked to sign an **informed consent** (see under heading "What Is Informed Consent?")
- How long the study may take, including your individual time commitment

If it is a study that has an **intervention** (any substance or therapy—such as a drug, psychological therapy, or surgical treatment—that produces an effect), you will be given information about

- Your chances of being in the group that receives the intervention (sometimes called the "treatment group") or in the **control** group. In some studies, people in the control group receive a **placebo** intervention (or inactive intervention) such as a pill with no active ingredients in it. In other studies, the control group may receive a standard treatment while the intervention group receives a new type of treatment
- How you will be assigned to your group; assignment is often done by **randomization** (a decision that is left to chance—similar to flipping a coin) to ensure that the outcomes are due to the interventions and not caused by other factors
- The possibility of experiencing an adverse reaction and the risks of using the intervention or being in the control group
- Other alternatives you may want to consider as treatment rather than being in the study

You should let the research team know about any prescription or nonprescription drugs or herbal supplements you are taking, so that you can avoid drug interactions.

You should always let your doctor know that you are participating in a study and give him or her information about the intervention you may be receiving as part of the study.

Sources: National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

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WHY YOU MAY WANT TO PARTICIPATE

Many medical discoveries have been made due to the help of volunteer participants in medical research. Your participation in a study could provide you with the latest treatment, improve medical treatment for others, and even save lives.

WHAT IS INFORMED CONSENT?

In general, **informed consent** is the idea that a person gives his or her consent to do something after being provided with the best information available. In medical research this means the best information available about the study and how it may affect you. Informed consent is an important part of the ethics of medical research. Researchers want willing participants who have not been misled in any way. You should ask the research team any questions you have and understand your role in the study completely before you agree to participate.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- ClinicalTrials.gov
Service of the National Institutes of Health
<http://clinicaltrials.gov/ct/gui/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDC National Prevention Information Network
Taking Part in Research Studies: What Questions Should I Ask?
800/458-5231
or www.cdc.gov

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm. JAMA Patient Pages on medical research were published September 13, 2000, and July 15, 1998.

