

Types of Clinical Studies

Each clinical study (also called clinical trial) is designed to address specific research questions. Furthermore, many clinical trials can also provide answers to additional questions. As one example, treatment trials—designed to primarily determine clinical outcomes, such as efficacy of an anticancer drug—can also evaluate the impact of the treatment on quality of life. In oncology, there are multiple types of clinical trials:



PREVENTION TRIALS

Designed to find out whether people without a cancer diagnosis can reduce their risk of cancer by proactively taking certain actions, such as increasing physical activity and eating healthily.



SCREENING TRIALS

Designed to evaluate new tests to detect cancer before symptoms arise, with the goal of determining whether the screening test will reduce deaths from cancer.



DIAGNOSTIC TRIALS

Designed to test new ways to diagnose a certain type of cancer.



TREATMENT TRIALS

Designed to determine whether new treatments or new ways of using existing treatments—alone or in combinations—are safe for patients and effective in treating cancer.



QUALITY OF LIFE TRIALS

Designed to examine whether patients with cancer can improve their quality of life by taking certain actions, such as attending support groups or exercising more. These trials are also known as supportive care or palliative care trials, and many evaluate the effects of certain cancer medications and treatments on quality of life.



NATURAL HISTORY OR OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES

Designed to learn more about how cancer develops and progresses by following patients with cancer or individuals who are at high risk for developing cancer over a period of years.



CORRELATIVE STUDIES

Designed to examine the efficacy of a candidate anticancer drug by using biomarkers, such as proteins, as indicators of the desired clinical outcome when the effects of the drug on key clinical outcomes, such as reduction in tumor size, may not be apparent.