

Clinical Trials

Participating in a clinical trial can be a way of gaining access to a promising treatment. Here are some things to be aware of if you decide to give this a try.

First, clinical trials are done in four phases. The first phase of a clinical trial determines whether a drug is safe; the second phase whether it is effective; the third phase whether it is better than the current standard for treating the disease; and the fourth phase looks at the drug's long-term efficacy and side effects as a follow-up study. The first phase has a relatively small number of participants, while the second phase has more participants.

Approval of a drug by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration generally occurs after the third phase, but, in very rare cases, may occur after the second phase.

Individuals can search for clinical trials by going to www.clinicaltrials.gov. The website also contains a lot of information about how clinical trials work.

The Life Raft Group's website has a section on clinical trials, which allows searches for recruiting trials for GIST patients. Some trials are aimed at individuals who are no longer responding well to standard therapies such as Gleevec and Sutent, while others target individuals who have never had Gleevec.

Each clinical trial has guidelines that contain inclusion and exclusion criteria that help determine who may participate. For example, GIST patients whose cancer has spread via metastasis might be excluded from a particular trial, while another trial may include only those individuals with wild-type GIST.

The Life Raft Group provides telephone support to help GIST patients navigate the clinical trial process at 973-837-9092.

Before entering a trial, individuals need to weigh the potential benefits of the promising treatment against the risks, and ask questions about the purpose and length of the study. A participant should be aware that they can withdraw from the clinical trial at any time.

Clinical trials are sponsored or funded by a variety of organizations or individuals such as physicians, medical institutions, foundations, voluntary groups, and pharmaceutical companies, in addition to federal agencies such as the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Trials can take place at hospitals, universities, doctors' offices or community clinics.

