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How should I ask my doctors about clinical trials?

Just ask!

Let's take a look at a conversation between a patient and a doctor.

Patient
I'd like to learn more about clinical trials and how they work. Can you tell me how a clinical trial could help me?

Doctor
Clinical trials are an option. If you decide to participate in a clinical trial and meet all of the eligibility requirements, your participation may help us understand your condition even better.

Patient
That sounds good, but how do I know if I'm eligible to join a clinical trial? Can we review my patient file together and talk about what things might make me eligible?

Doctor
Eligibility criteria are different for each trial, so it depends on which one we decide on. We can review your patient file together before you make any decisions. Most of the eligibility criteria include things like your age, gender, heart conditions, liver conditions, tumor type and size, or other things that might affect how well a study treatment would work for you.

Patient
What should I know about why a study is being done? And where would I go if I did decide to participate?

Doctor
The purpose of a trial depends on the type of treatment, the condition, the design of the study, and other similar things. When you join a trial, the study team of doctors and coordinators will explain everything to you in depth. Clinical trial activities usually take place at universities and large hospitals, but some trials allow some activities and tests to take place at your local clinic or pharmacy or even by telephone.

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Patient
How will I know if the treatment is working?

Doctor
Each trial will have a different set of physical exams, lab tests, or other activities that will help your doctor and the study team determine if a treatment is working well for you. This will all be discussed with you when you talk with the study team about the study design

Patient
Who is part of the study team? Who will I talk to if I have questions if I join the trial?

Doctor
Your study team will include a doctor, called an investigator or principal (lead) investigator, a study coordinator, nurses, and other healthcare professionals. They will work together to make sure everything goes smoothly while you're participating in the study. You'll probably be talking most often with the study coordinator or a clinical research coordinator - both of these roles are often helpful points of contact if you have questions.

Patient
Has the drug, device, or treatment being tested been used before?

Doctor
It will depend on the specific treatment being studied, the condition it is being used to treat, and the way the study is designed. In all cases, any treatment that you receive will have had a lot of prior testing before you take it.

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