Clinical trials

You can contribute to the advancement of Parkinson's research, with or without the condition. Clinical trials for Parkinson's, which might include looking at various treatments and interventions, offer hope for those affected.

What is a clinical trial?

Clinical trials are research studies designed to evaluate new treatments, interventions, or approaches to managing Parkinson's. These trials help determine the safety, effectiveness, and potential benefits of new therapies before they become widely available.

One of the biggest challenges in treating Parkinson's is that there are still no medicines that can slow down how the condition gets worse over time, even though many clinical trials have tried to find one.

Why should you participate?

Participating in a clinical trial allows people with and without Parkinson's to contribute to scientific advancements, access cutting-edge treatments, and help shape the future of Parkinson's care.

- You can help advance science and future treatments.
- You may gain access to new therapies not yet widely available.
- You'll be closely monitored by medical professionals.
- You're helping others with Parkinson's, now and in the future.

However, not everyone has the same chance to join Parkinson's research. This can make it harder for certain groups, especially people from underrepresented backgrounds, to take part in research.

DBS also often precludes people from participating in trials, and sometimes if you are on medications already you cannot participate. Always look at the patient information sheet for eligibility requirements for trials.

Types of clinical trials run globally

Clinical trials for Parkinson's vary in focus and methods. Some of the most common types include:

1. Drug trials evaluate new medications or repurposed drugs to slow progression or manage symptoms. E.g. Trials testing levodopa-based therapies or dopamine agonists.

2. Device & technology trials assess medical devices such as deep brain stimulation (DBS) implants or wearable technologies for symptom monitoring. E.g. Studies on non-invasive neuromodulation devices.

3. Lifestyle & rehabilitation trials investigate the impact of exercise, diet, and physiotherapy on Parkinson's symptoms. E.g. Research on high-intensity exercise programs improving motor function.

4. Genetic & biomarker studies explore genetic factors contributing to Parkinson's and identify biomarkers for early diagnosis. E.g. Trials using genomic sequencing to personalise treatment approaches.

5. Stem cell & regenerative medicine trials examine the potential of stem cell therapy to repair damaged neurons and restore function. E.g. Studies testing dopaminergic neuron transplantation.

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Top 10 things to think about before joining a clinical trial

1. **There are risks & benefits**: Trials may have side effects, or you may get the placebo, but they can also offer early access to new treatments and expert care.
2. **Your safety comes first:** All trials follow strict safety rules and are reviewed by independent experts.
3. **You can find trials in many ways:** Ask your GP, join a support group, contact your local Uni or search online. You can even register to be matched with upcoming trials.
4. **You can leave at any time:** You're always in control. You can stop participating whenever you choose.
5. **You'll get clear information:** Before you join, the research team will explain everything and answer your questions.
6. **You're helping future treatments:** Your participation helps researchers develop better ways to treat Parkinson's symptoms.
7. **People living with Parkinson's are key research partners:** You are the expert on your Parkinson's. Your voice and experience matter in research.
8. **There is a study for everyone:** Whether you're newly diagnosed, have had Parkinson's for years, or don't have it at all... there's a study for you.
9. **Not every study tests a drug:** Some studies focus on exercise, therapy, cognitive abilities, or collecting data, not just testing medication.
10. **You're not alone & support is available:** You'll have support from your care team, Parkinson's organisations, and others who've been through it.

How do I access a clinical trial in Australia?

Step 1: Search for available trials
First talk to your neurologist or GP, they most likely have other patients in trials. You can also visit the Australian Clinical trial finder or Australian & New Zealand Clinical Trials Registry to search for studies.

Check with the Movement Disorders Australia & New Zealand Clinical Trials Network (MDSANZ CTN), your local universities, your local, state or territory Parkinson's organisation, and research institutions for potential projects to take part in (e.g. NHMRC; NeuRa; SAHMRI).

Others in your care team may also know of trials that focus on occupational therapy, diet, exercise, physiotherapy, and more... don't be afraid to ask.

Step 2: Speak to your care team
Discuss the trial's potential risks, benefits, and eligibility criteria with your care team. Consult your neurologist or GP to determine if a trial is suitable for your condition. You may be asked to come off your medications for all or part of some trials. To do this safely, you need medical support.

Step 3: Register your interest
Contact trial coordinators through research institutions to enquire.

Step 4: Understand your rights & responsibilities
Participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Ensure you receive detailed information about the trial's purpose, duration, and procedures.

Infosheet kindly reviewed by MDSANZ C linical Trials Network.

Movement Disorder Society of Australia and New Zealand
MDSANZ

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