PATIENT AND FAMILY GUIDE

Clinical trials for pancreatic cancer

What trials are, how eligibility and participation work, and how to explore trials in Canada with your care team.

Newfoundland and Labrador · Atlantic Canada · Canada

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- When trials should come up
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One safety note. Do not stop or delay prescribed treatment while searching for a trial without discussing the timing with your care team.

READ IT ONLINE

This guide is kept up to date at heathercutler.ca/treatment-options/clinical-trials. Scan the code with your phone camera.

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INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

What is a clinical trial?

Clinical trials are research studies involving people. They help researchers learn whether new approaches to treatment or care are safe, effective, and better than existing options.

A trial may be worth discussing at different points in your care — not only after other treatments have stopped working. Taking part is a personal choice, and no trial can promise benefit: trials test approaches whose benefits and risks are not fully established, and the treatment being studied may not help and can cause serious harm.

YOUR CHOICE

An opportunity to explore — not an obligation to participate

The World Pancreatic Cancer Coalition advocates for people diagnosed with pancreatic cancer to have the opportunity to take part in clinical trials. Whether a particular study is appropriate depends on its requirements, the person's health and preferences, and the available alternatives. Being offered the conversation is the point — the decision itself is always yours.

TIMING

When should trials come up?

Trials can be relevant at several points: at diagnosis, before starting a new treatment, when a treatment stops working, or if the cancer comes back. Raising the subject early does not commit you to anything. It protects your options, because some studies have requirements about previous treatments, and a person's health can change in ways that narrow what is possible later.

> If trials have not been mentioned, it is reasonable to ask at any appointment:
> **"Is a clinical trial something we should be discussing at this stage?"**

THE BASICS

What kinds of trials are there?

Not every study provides an experimental drug. Clinical trials can investigate:

- New treatments, or new combinations of existing treatments.
- Ways to diagnose or monitor cancer.
- Symptom management and supportive care.
- Other approaches to improving care.

Some trials require a particular tumour finding, such as a specific gene change. Others test treatments, supportive care, or diagnostic approaches that have nothing to do with biomarkers. A molecular result is one possible doorway into a trial — not a requirement for all of them. Our guides to biomarker testing and KRAS changes explain tumour findings in more detail.

What are trial phases?

Phase	Main question
Phase 1	What dose or schedule can be used, and what are the safety concerns?
Phase 2	Does the approach show activity in a particular setting, and what side effects occur?
Phase 3	How does it compare with the current standard treatment?
Phase 4	What more can be learned after approval?

Some studies combine phases. The phase tells you what the study is designed to learn — it does not tell an individual how likely they are to benefit.

ELIGIBILITY

Could I be eligible?

Every study sets out who can and cannot take part. These rules — called inclusion and exclusion criteria — may concern:

- The type and extent of the cancer.
- Treatments already received.
- Particular tumour findings.
- General health and the ability to manage daily activities.
- Organ function and blood test results.
- Other medical conditions, or medicines being taken.

You may also see "performance status" in trial criteria — often the ECOG scale, a 0-to-5 measure of how much daily activity a person can manage. The study team assesses this as part of screening; it is not a score you give yourself.

> **Identifying a possibility is not the same as being eligible.** A search result, a matching service, or an initial conversation can identify studies that might fit. Only the study team can confirm eligibility after reviewing the details — and identifying a study does not reserve a place in it.

TAKING PART

What would participation involve?

Before deciding, you should have the chance to discuss:

- What treatment each group in the study receives, and how groups are assigned.
- Whether assignment is random, where that applies.
- Visits, scans, blood tests, and biopsies — and how often.
- Travel and time away from home.
- How long follow-up continues.

- How the study fits alongside your ordinary care.

> **About placebos:** placebos are not used instead of effective standard treatment. A study may compare standard treatment plus a new medicine against standard treatment plus a placebo, so that everyone receives the established treatment. Ask what each group in the specific study actually receives.

Possible benefits and risks

Possible benefits include access to an approach being studied, closer contact with a research team, and contributing to knowledge that may improve care for others. Set against that: the treatment may not work better than existing care, may not help at all, and may cause unexpected or serious side effects. Extra monitoring is part of how studies are run — it is not a guarantee of a better outcome.

You can say no — and you can leave

Participation is voluntary. Informed consent is an ongoing discussion, not just a signature on a form: you can ask questions at any point, decline to take part, or leave a study after joining. If you withdraw, the research team will help you stop any study medication safely. Before joining, ask what happens to your care, and to the information already collected, if you withdraw.

GETTING STARTED

How do I start? Finding trials in Canada

A manageable sequence:

1. Ask your oncology team whether a trial assessment is appropriate for you.
2. Ask about studies at your own centre, and about referrals to other centres.
3. Use a Canadian information or search resource (below) to see what exists.
4. Contact the study team to confirm the study is recruiting and what it requires.
5. Discuss any possible study with your treating team before changing any plans.

Resource	Who runs it	What it covers
HCF Explore™ trials.heathercutler.ca	The Heather Cutler Foundation	Browse pancreatic cancer studies with sites in Canada, with plain-language summaries and filters for province, recruitment status, and trial phase. Free to use, with no account, personal information, or medical record uploads required.
Cancer Trials Canada cancertrialscanada.ca	Canadian Cancer Society and Q-CROC (Quebec — Clinical Research Organization in Cancer)	Search cancer clinical trials across Canada, with plain-language information on benefits, risks, costs, and taking part.
Health Canada's clinical trial search portal canada.ca (search "clinical trial search portal")	Health Canada	Information on authorized phase 1 to 3 patient drug trials in Canada. It is not a complete catalogue of every kind of research study.

Resource	Who runs it	What it covers
Find a Trial — 3CTN **3ctn.ca**	Canadian Cancer Clinical Trials Network (3CTN)	Directs patients to the Canadian Cancer Trial Finder and to navigation help for finding studies.
Craig's Cause — Clinical Trials **craigscause.ca**	Craig's Cause Pancreatic Cancer Society	Pancreatic-cancer-specific information about clinical trials and how to look for them.

All five resources are free to use, and none of them enrols you — contacting a study team is always a separate step. Resource details checked October 28, 2026.



LOOKING FOR A TRIAL?

The Heather Cutler Foundation's clinical trials directory lists pancreatic cancer trials with sites in Canada, drawn from ClinicalTrials.gov. You can search by province and see which trials are accepting participants.

trials.heathercutler.ca

REACHING OUT

Contacting a study team

Some study teams accept direct enquiries from patients or caregivers; others require a referral from a clinician. Contacting a team is a first enquiry — not confirmation that you can join. Ask what information they need, and how to send it securely. Please do not send medical records through ordinary email or upload them to general AI tools; ask the team for their secure method.

A USEFUL ENQUIRY

Subject: Enquiry about [trial name or identifier]

I am seeking information about this study for someone receiving care in [province/country]. Is your site currently recruiting for the relevant pancreatic cancer group?

Do you accept direct enquiries, or is a physician referral required? What information do you need, and how should it be sent securely?

TRAVEL

Considering a trial away from home?

Many pancreatic cancer trials run at a small number of centres, so travel — within Canada or internationally — is a common question. Discussing a study outside Canada with your Canadian team is the starting point; each receiving centre has its own referral requirements, and coordination with your home team matters. Before committing to a study away from home, get written clarification about:

- Which costs the study covers, and which it does not.
- Ordinary medical-care costs, as distinct from research costs.
- Travel, accommodation, and caregiver expenses.
- Emergency care and complications — who pays, and where.

- Insurance coverage and any approvals required for care connected to the trial.
- Whether the visit schedule is manageable from where you live.
- Who coordinates your care when you return home.

Do not assume that treatment or travel is paid for because the study medicine is supplied. Coverage depends on the particular study, policy, and circumstances — check each one.

Access outside a trial

Separately from trials, Health Canada's Special Access Program allows a practitioner to request a drug that is not sold in Canada for a patient with a serious or life-threatening condition when conventional treatments have failed, are unsuitable, or are unavailable in Canada. Only a practitioner can make the request, and authorization is not guaranteed. Special Access is not a clinical trial and not a substitute for one — it is a distinct route your doctor may consider in specific circumstances.

FROM OUR FAMILY'S EXPERIENCE

We learned that trial planning involved more than identifying a promising study. Timing, health, travel, and communication all mattered. Our experience is one reason we encourage early conversations with the care team.

BRING THIS TO YOUR APPOINTMENT

Questions to take to your appointment

Tick the ones you want to ask. There is space below for notes.

- [ ] Is a clinical trial something we should discuss at this stage?
- [ ] Are there studies at this centre — or elsewhere — that might fit my situation?
- [ ] Would you refer me, and what would the study team need from you?
- [ ] What would participation involve, in visits, tests, and travel?
- [ ] What are the possible benefits and risks, compared with my other options?
- [ ] What costs would I or my family carry?
- [ ] What happens to my care if I say no, or if I join and later withdraw?
- [ ] When should we revisit this conversation?

Notes from the appointment

ONE PAGE PER STUDY

Clinical trial discussion and enquiry planner

Keep one page per study you are exploring. It is an organizer, not an eligibility calculator — the study team makes eligibility decisions. Print as many copies as you need.

Trial name and identifier

Centre and contact

Date recruitment was checked

Referral required, or direct enquiry accepted?

Records requested, and the secure way to send them

Questions for my oncologist

Travel and cost questions, and the answers in writing

Next action, and who is responsible for it

KEEP LEARNING

Related guides

- Expanded clinical trial access — our policy work on widening access to trials in Canada.
- Getting a second opinion — how second opinions and referrals work.
- Treatment options — the main treatments for pancreatic cancer in Canada.
- Biomarker testing — what tumour testing covers.
- KRAS changes in pancreatic cancer — what a KRAS result means.

Find them all at **heathercutler.ca/patient-resources**.

SOURCES

- Health Canada — Clinical trials and drug safety (eligibility, voluntary participation, withdrawal).
- Canadian Cancer Society — Types and phases of clinical trials; Clinical trial benefits, risks and costs.
- Health Canada — Request a drug through the Special Access Program.
- World Pancreatic Cancer Coalition — Our impact (the opportunity to participate in trials).

This guide is general information about clinical trials for people with pancreatic cancer in Canada, not medical advice. Whether a trial is appropriate depends on your situation and the study's requirements — discuss it with your care team, and confirm recruitment and requirements directly with the study team.

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The Heather Cutler Foundation

Pancreatic cancer education, patient support, and advocacy

Heather's Fight Became Our Mission.

Call (855) 754-5045
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