Participation in research studies:  
* A guide to decision-making

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Have you ever wondered if you should participate as a subject in a health care research study? Should you encourage a loved one to participate?

On the positive side, studies on seniors may result in important advances in care and treatment, and researchers may really need you as a subject. Recruitment of human subjects is challenging for all fields of research, but particularly when seniors are involved, because many are reluctant to sign forms. However, since much remains to be learned about specific needs of seniors and best treatment practices, the study that wants to recruit you could have important implications for you or those close to you.

On the other hand, projects needing subjects probably will not immediately benefit you personally. Or there could be some risks to participation. At the very least, it will take some time and effort on your part.

Research on human subjects must always have an ethics review designed to protect the rights of participants. Here are some points to look for and expect in a consent form.

- The study purpose should be explained and should seem worthwhile to you.
- Names of the person in charge and others involved with the study, their credentials, and the source of financial support for the research should be stated clearly.
- It should state that you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. If the researcher is your own doctor, this withdrawal should not affect your care in any way.
- What is expected of subjects should be spelled out: What will happen, how much of your time it will take, how often you will be contacted, and how long you will be asked to participate.
- If it is a drug trial, you will not know if you are getting the test drug or a placebo, but you should be given some idea of what sort of medication or substance it is and the risk of undesirable effects.
- If diagnostic tests (such as blood work) will be done, you should be told what kind and how often.
- If trips to a hospital or clinic are involved, you might consider the time and expense involved and whether you will be reimbursed for parking or gas.
- Finally, the consent form should name a person outside of the research team to contact if you have any concerns about how the study is being conducted.

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