Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport

Medical Research

General information for subjects

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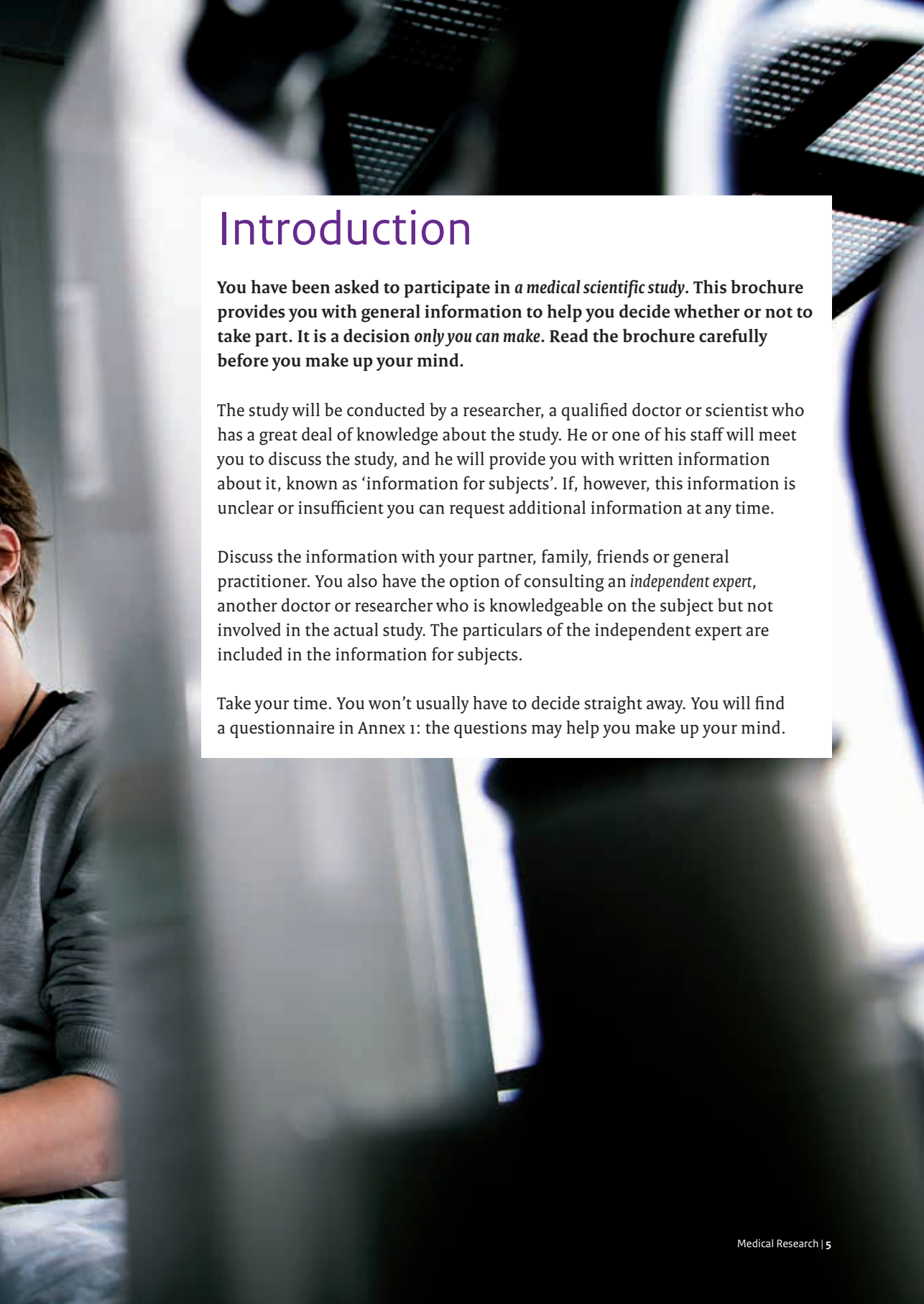


Introduction

You have been asked to participate in *a medical scientific study*. This brochure provides you with general information to help you decide whether or not to take part. It is a decision *only you can make*. Read the brochure carefully before you make up your mind.

The study will be conducted by a researcher, a qualified doctor or scientist who has a great deal of knowledge about the study. He or one of his staff will meet you to discuss the study, and he will provide you with written information about it, known as 'information for subjects'. If, however, this information is unclear or insufficient you can request additional information at any time.

Discuss the information with your partner, family, friends or general practitioner. You also have the option of consulting an *independent expert*, another doctor or researcher who is knowledgeable on the subject but not involved in the actual study. The particulars of the independent expert are included in the information for subjects.

Take your time. You won't usually have to decide straight away. You will find a questionnaire in Annex 1: the questions may help you make up your mind.

Medical research

What is medical research?

If you have health problems you go to a doctor, who will examine you to determine the cause. The purpose of this *diagnostic investigation* is to make you better.

There is also *medical research*, the primary purpose of which is not to cure you of an illness or ailment. People who take part in medical research are known as 'subjects' ('trial subjects' or 'research subjects').

There are three types of medical research:

1. **Research into improving treatments for illnesses**
   Examples: a more effective medication for headaches, a new kind of heart valve, or a new treatment for depression

2. **Research to provide more information on an illness or how the body functions**
   Examples: How does the skin react to sunlight? Can you get high blood pressure from eating liquorice? What causes ADHD

3. **Research into better ways of detecting or diagnosing diseases**
   Examples: How can we detect breast cancer at an early stage? How can we diagnose heart disease?

What are subjects?

Anyone who participates in a medical scientific study is known as a 'subject'. There are two types of subjects, healthy volunteers and patients. Patients may benefit from taking part in the study.

What does the study involve?

A lot of studies merely involve collecting data, for example on body temperature, levels of particular substances in the blood or how you feel. These involve undergoing a physical examination or test. You may need to keep a diary.

Another type of study involves testing a new treatment, operation or medication. For the sake of simplicity we shall refer to all of these as 'treatment'. The researcher usually compares the new treatment with an existing one. The subjects to receive each treatment are chosen at random. This process is called 'randomization'.

It is matter of chance to which group you are assigned, and the researcher will often not know which one you are in. The study is then termed ‘double blind’: neither you nor the researcher knows which group you are in. This ensures a more neutral manner of comparing the results of the two groups.

The researcher may compare a new treatment with a fake one, known as a ‘placebo’. The placebo looks exactly the same as the new treatment. One group of subjects is given the new treatment while the other is given the placebo.

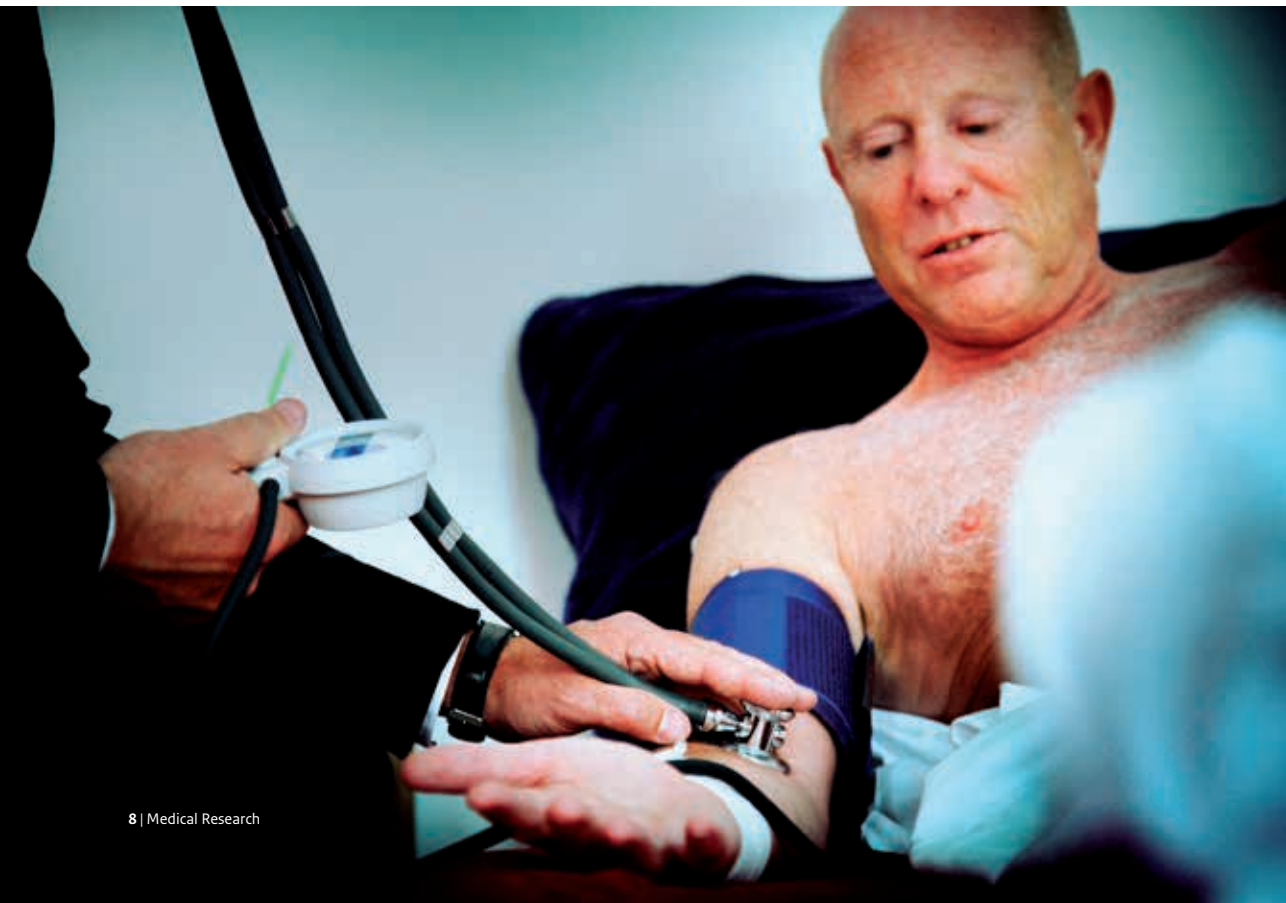
Taking part

Deciding whether to take part

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in a medical scientific study. It is *voluntary*. You are never under any obligation to participate. Only do so if you are sure you are fully aware of what the study involves and the possible risks and benefits.

What are the benefits for you?

- You are contributing to medical progress.
- If you're a patient you may benefit from a new treatment. But then again maybe not. The study may add to our knowledge of a disease process, for example. The researcher will tell you about this. You will not usually be paid for taking part in the study, but in many cases your travel expenses will be reimbursed.
- If you're a healthy volunteer you may be paid for taking part. You will usually have to pay tax on this. Your travel expenses will almost always be reimbursed.



Things to bear in mind

- If you're a patient and you take part you will usually have to **return several times for checkups**. You may need to keep a diary. So taking part sometimes involves time and effort.
- If you're a healthy volunteer taking part will also **take time**: a half-day, for example, or several short visits. You may even be required to spend one or two days in a hospital or clinic.
- Participating is not without its **risks**. The treatment is new and still under investigation, so not all the possible effects and side effects will be known. The researcher will often conduct additional tests or take blood samples. How great the risk is depends on the type of study and your state of health. The researcher will explain this to you.
- Participating may be **stressful or unpleasant**, as:
  - additional physical examinations may be necessary
  - you may be asked questions about distressing experiences
  - you may be required to stop taking medication which you normally take
  - you may be required to obey special rules, for example on drinking, smoking or contraception.

What is the procedure for *taking part*?

If you decide to participate you will be required to sign a declaration known as a 'consent form'. By signing it you certify that you are participating voluntarily. You will be given a copy.

In many cases you will undergo a medical examination first: the researcher will check whether you are physically fit to take part. You may be deemed unfit to participate, in which case the researcher will tell you.

What happens if you change your mind? You always retain the right not to take part or to withdraw at any time, even after the study has started. You don't need to give a reason. If you're a patient you will simply be given the treatment that you would normally receive.

What is the procedure if you do *not* wish to take part?

If you don't want to take part you don't need to do anything or sign anything. You don't need to explain why. If you're a patient you will simply be given the treatment that you would normally receive.

Child subjects

Children and young people under the age of 18 can also take part in medical scientific studies. For the sake of simplicity we use the term 'child' in this booklet to mean anyone under 18.

Studies involving children are only permitted if they comply with stringent rules, for example on the risks to which child subjects may be exposed, which must not be too high. There are also special rules on consent, which are set out below.

Your child has been asked to take part in *a medical scientific study

If your child is willing to take part in the trial and you consent to this, you must sign a consent form. It must be signed by both parents (or the guardian). If your child is aged between 12 and 18 he or she must also sign the consent form. Only then will he or she be permitted to take part.

Withdrawal

What happens if you change your mind? Your child always retains the right not to take part, and you (or your child) can withdraw at any time, even after the study has started. You don't need to give a reason. If your child is a patient he or she will simply be given the treatment that he or she would normally receive.

If your child displays unwillingness while the study is in progress – fear, mental pain or anger, for example – he or she cannot continue. The researcher will discuss with you what is regarded as unwillingness before the study begins.

What is the procedure if you don't agree to your child taking part?

If you don't want your child to take part in the study you don't need to do anything or sign anything. You don't need to give a reason. If your child is a patient he or she will simply be given the treatment that he or she would normally receive.

* At the time of going to press the age limit below which a child's parents or guardian had to consent to the child taking part was 18. By the time you read this booklet the law may have been changed and the parents' consent may no longer be required for a child of 16 or over.

You're aged between 12 and 18 years and would like to take part in *a medical scientific study*

If your parents consent to your participation, you must sign a consent form. Your parents (or guardian) must also sign the form. Only then will you be permitted to take part.

Withdrawal

Have you changed your mind? You always retain the right not to take part or to withdraw at any time, even after the trial has started. You don't need to give a reason. If you're a patient you will be given the treatment that you would normally receive.

What is the procedure if you do not wish to take part?

If you don't want to take part in the trial you don't need to do anything or sign anything. You don't need to give a reason. If you're a patient you will be given the treatment that you.

Legally incapable subjects

Both adults (anyone aged 18 or over) and children can be *legally incapable*. Old people with dementia, the mentally handicapped, coma patients and people with severe mental health conditions, for example, cannot always judge what is in their interests. If a person is legally incapable, important decisions are made on his or her behalf by a representative, who could be the person's parents, husband, wife or children. In some cases the representative is appointed by a court.

Medical scientific studiesinvolving people who are legally incapable are only permitted if they comply with stringent rules, for example on the risks to which a legally incapable subject may be exposed, which must not be too high. There are also special rules on consent, which are set out below.

Do you represent someone who is legally incapable?
Does the researcher want the legally incapable person to take part in a medical scientific study? If you consent to the legally incapable person taking part you must sign a consent form.

Withdrawal
What happens if you change your mind? You can decide to withdraw the legally incapable person at any time, even after the study has started. You don't need to give a reason. If the legally incapable person is a patient he or she will simply be given the treatment that he or she would normally receive. If the legally incapable person displays unwillingness while the study is in progress – fear, mental pain or anger, for example – he or she cannot continue. The researcher will discuss with you what is regarded as unwillingness before the trial begins.

What is the procedure if you don't agree to the legally incapable person taking part?
If you don't want the legally incapable person to take part in the study you don't need to do anything or sign anything. You don't need to give a reason. If the legally incapable person is a patient, he or she will simply be given the treatment that he or she would normally receive.

Rights and obligations

What are your rights as a subject?

You have rights as a subject, which are laid down in the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act. The main ones are:

The right to decide for yourself whether to take part in a medical scientific study

It is up to you. Even if your doctor asks you to participate you can always refuse.

The right to be informed and ask questions

The researcher is required to meet you first to discuss the study. He must also provide you with written information on the study. You can ask any questions you may have at any time, before, during and after the study. The researcher must answer your questions. There will also be an independent expert who is knowledgeable on the subject but not involved in the actual study. You can also ask him questions about the study, usually by phone.

The right to take time to think things over

You won't usually have to decide straight away whether to take part in the study. You have the right to read the information at your leisure in the comfort of your own home. There are instances, however, when a quick decision is required, for example if you're a patient in Accident & Emergency.

The right to withdraw from the study

You may express your wish not to take part at any time, even after the study has already started. You don't need to give a reason. If you withdraw it will not have any effect on the treatment you were being given before the study began. There may be times when immediate withdrawal is not possible because it could be bad for your health, so if you do wish to withdraw always inform the researcher beforehand.

The right to data protection

During the study the researcher will gather data on you. This will be treated as confidential and stored under a code. Your name will not be mentioned in any reports on the study, the code will be used instead. Other people apart from the researcher may also be given access to your data: who these people are will be set out on the consent form or in the information for subjects. These people (the research team and the Health Care Inspectorate, for example) will check whether the study is sound and reliable. The procedure is laid down e.g. in the Personal Data Protection Act. The researcher will hold on to your data while the study is in progress. You only give consent for your data to be used for this particular study.

You can give consent for your data to be used for future research, in which case the researcher will keep your data. If the researcher wishes to use that data for another study he will ask you for consent again. More information on the subject can be found in the information for subjects that you will have been given by the researcher.

Body material

Blood, saliva or other body material may be taken from you. It may only be used for the study for which you have given your consent. The researcher may wish to use it later for another study: if so, he must obtain special consent from you. More information on the subject can be found in the information for subjects that you will have been given by the researcher.

Your obligations as a subject

You must adhere to the rules of the study, which will differ from one study to another. You may need to start the study on a completely empty stomach. You may have to take a pill at the same time every day, or keep a record of how you feel every day.

It is important that you adhere to the rules, otherwise the researcher will be unable to conduct the study properly and the results will be invalid. The researcher may then decide that you can no longer take part in the study.

Monitoring

Who checks whether the study is being conducted correctly?

The Netherlands has stringent rules on the conduct of medical scientificstudies involving human subjects, which are laid down in the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act.

A special committee, known as the 'medical ethics committee', reviews each study in advance. For the sake of brevity we shall refer to this as the 'ethics committee'. A study cannot start until it has been approved by the ethics committee. The ethics committee reviews such things as:

- whether the study is worthwhile
- whether the study has been correctly designed
- whether the information you are being given is correct
- that the risks involved in the study are not too high
- that the burden on subjects is not too severe.

The members of the ethics committee are experts on clinical studies. They will be doctors, for example, or will be familiar with the laws and regulations in this area. They will not stand to gain from the study or have a personal interest in it. You can find particulars of the ethics committee that has reviewed your study in the information for subjects provided by the researcher.

What happens if something goes wrong?

It is the not in the researcher's interests for anything to go wrong with a study, of course, but problems can sometimes occur. Subjects are therefore insured in the event of anything going wrong. The only case in which this is not required is if the study does not entail any risks.

If you suffer any harm as a result of the study you can contact the researcher or the insurance company. More information about this can be found in the information for subjects that you will have been given by the researcher.

More information

Where can I find more information?

- From the **researcher**, who will supply you with written information for subjects. This will be specifically about the study that you have been asked to take part in. Do not hesitate to ask the researcher questions at any time.
- From the **independent expert**: you can find this person's name and phone number in the information that you will have been given by the researcher.
- On **www.ccmo.nl**, the website of the Central Committee of Research involving Human Subjects (CCMO). The CCMO closely monitors medical scientific studiesinvolving human subjects. You can find general information on its site.

Where can I go to complain?

If you have a complaint about the study it is best to discuss it with the researcher first. If you prefer not to, you can contact the complaints committee of the hospital or clinic where the study is taking place. You can find the phone number in the information provided by the researcher.

The study must not involve your being exposed to unnecessary (avoidable) risks. You can also report to the Health Care Inspectorate, the IGZ (www.igz.nl). When the IGZ will investigate a report, and if so how, is set out on its website.

Tip
You can take someone along with you to discuss the study with the researcher. Two pairs of ears can be better than one. It may also help to write important points down.

Annex 1: Questionnaire for the Research Subject

Read these questions before you decide whether to take part. The questions may help you make up your mind. You will find many answers in the information for subjects provided by the researcher. If you have any other questions, ask the researcher.

1. What is the **purpose** of the study?

2. How might the study **benefit** me?

3. **Why** has the researcher asked me to take part?

4. **How much time** will the study take?

5. Precisely what do I have to **do** (**and not do**) as a subject?

6. What are the possible **risks** or **side effects**?

7. I am trying to get **pregnant**. Can I still take part?

8. Do I need to **stop taking** my own **medication**?

9. Who can I go to if **something goes wrong** during the study?

10. Are **subjects insured** for taking part in the study?

11. What will happen to my **data**?

12. Will I be told the **results** of the study?

13. When will I find out **which treatment** I was given?

14. Who can I contact if I have any **questions**?

Annex 2: The Development Of New Drugs

Drug trials account for about a third of all medical scientific studies. Before patients can be given a new drug, researchers have to ensure it is safe. A new drug is developed in three steps.

1. **In the laboratory**
   Researchers are constantly on the lookout for new drugs in the laboratory, where they are thoroughly tested.

2. **Tests on laboratory animals**
   If the lab tests prove positive, further research is carried out on laboratory animals. The researchers examine the effect of the drug on the animals and check whether there are any side effects.

3. **Trials on humans**
   Tests on laboratory animals show whether the drug appears to be safe and effective. Only if that is the case do trials on humans begin. Extensive testing will therefore have been carried out before you are asked to take part in a trial. Drug trials on humans fall into four phases:

   Phase 1: Is the drug safe?
   The researchers check how well trial subjects (usually healthy volunteers) tolerate the drug and examine how it works in the body.
   Phase 2: Is the drug effective?
   If the drug is sufficiently safe it is tested on a small number of patients.
   At this stage the researchers check whether it really is effective.
   Phase 3: Is the drug more effective than the existing drugs?
   If the results of Phase 2 are positive, the researchers ask more patients to take part in a trial. They will often compare the new drug with an existing drug. If the results are good it will often be registered as an approved drug, and doctors will then be permitted to prescribe it.
   Phase 4: What are the long-term effects?
   Trials are also carried out on drugs that are already being prescribed by doctors, in some cases involving tens of thousands of patients. The purpose is usually to examine their long-term side effects. A drug may also be investigated to see whether it is effective against other diseases.

Annex 3: Personal notes

Imprint
This brochure has been produced for the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport in association with the Central Committee on Research involving Human Subjects and the certified medical ethics committees.

For a free brochure
Visit the website www.rijksoverheid.nl or phone 0800 - 1400 (free of charge).

By phone
You can phone 1400 on weekdays between 08.00 and 20.00.
Normal charges apply. If you are calling from outside the Netherlands, please dial +31 (0)77 465 6767.

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