

## Participating in research is a choice

Joining a research study is an important personal decision. Before you join, make sure you understand the goals of the study, and possible risks and benefits. Make sure you understand how the researchers will protect your information and privacy. Ask for help if you don't understand something or have questions.

You should never feel rushed or pressured to make a decision. Being part of a research study is completely voluntary – it's your choice. You can change your mind at any time, for any reason.

## Agreeing to participate

Once you understand the research, you can decide if you want to take the survey or not.

If you want to participate in most research studies, you need to sign an informed consent form. This shows you understand the study and agree to be in the study. Survey studies do not always ask you to sign an informed consent form. Instead, you show agreement by doing the survey and sending it back.

Some surveys are done on the phone or in person, where a researcher asks you questions. The researcher may explain the study and then ask if it is okay to move on to the survey questions.”

For more information, see our [Social and Behavioral Research](https://catalyst.harvard.edu/SocialBehavioralResearch.pdf) brochure at:  
[catalyst.harvard.edu/SocialBehavioralResearch.pdf](https://catalyst.harvard.edu/SocialBehavioralResearch.pdf)

## Questions to ask

You have the right to ask questions about a research study before you decide whether to take part in it. Below is a list of questions you might want to ask before you agree to participate in a survey.

- > What is the purpose of the study?
- > What kind of questions will be asked?
- > How long does the study last?
- > How long will the survey take?
- > Will I be paid in any way for participating?
- > Will my responses be linked to my personal information?
- > How will you protect my personal information?
- > What happens if I decide to leave the study early?
- > Can I take back my responses at any time? If so, how?
- > Will my personal information be in any publications?

## PARTICIPATING IN A SURVEY



Participating in research is your choice. Be informed. Ask questions. Get answers.

Surveys gather information by asking you to answer questions. Researchers use surveys to learn your opinions and feelings on a topic or why you behave a certain way. This helps researchers understand and solve medical and social problems.



Questions? Call us at



This brochure contains general information for educational purposes and is not intended to provide medical advice. Talk with your own doctor or the research team for advice about your personal situation and health concerns.

## What is survey research?

Surveys gather information by asking you to answer questions. Surveys help researchers to learn your opinions and feelings on a topic or why you behave a certain way. Survey research is done several different ways. It can be by mail, on the Internet, by phone, or in person.

## How do researchers use surveys?

Researchers use surveys to help answer scientific questions. Surveys can help them understand and solve medical and social problems. Surveys can also help researchers learn if programs or treatments are working well.

Researchers might ask you to do just one survey, or several over months or years. If you do not want to participate, you can ask the researchers not to contact you again.

Sometimes, researchers encourage people to do surveys by offering a cash payment, gift cards, or entry into a prize drawing. You might get this before or after you do the survey. Other times, researchers do not pay people to complete surveys.

## If a researcher asks you to do a survey:

You may get a short letter or email describing the research study, including:

- > What the survey is about
- > Who is doing the research
- > How long the survey will take
- > How researchers will use the information and protect your identity
- > If you will be paid or entered in a prize drawing for taking the survey
- > Who to contact with questions

Before you decide to participate, make sure you understand:

- > The details of the study
- > Your rights as a research participant
- > How your privacy will be protected

Even if you agree to participate in the research, you can change your mind any time and decide not to answer any more survey questions.

## Completing a survey

In some surveys, you must answer every question. In other surveys, you can skip any question you do not want to answer. Some surveys might also have choices like “prefer not to respond” or “no answer.” Even if you complete the survey, you can choose not to send in your responses. You can sometimes take back your survey after you send it. But this might be difficult, especially if your answers do not have your name on them.

## Protecting your privacy

Many surveys ask you to give some information about yourself, such as your age, gender, or ethnic background.

It is important to learn if your survey responses are connected to any information that could identify you. This includes your name, address, email, and phone number. If you take a survey on the Internet, it is important to know if your responses are electronically protected, or “encrypted,” when the survey is sent to the researchers.

The study team works to protect and store your information. You can ask the study team how they do this. You can also ask if the published research results will identify you in any way.

