A clinical research study is a scientific way to improve health care. Studies can be designed to answer specific questions on how to better prevent, diagnose, or treat diseases and disorders. Clinical Trials involve the testing of new medicines or devices and are important because they contribute to the discovery and confirmation that treatments actually improve the health of patients.

People volunteer to participate in clinical trials for a variety of reasons. Some volunteers may hope to improve their own health by accessing interventions before they become widely available, as well as to help science advance for the benefit of the larger population of people/patients with the disease. Experimental and sometimes established medications are be provided to a qualifying participant at no cost. Finally, most participants report that their participation in these studies enhances their understanding of their disease and how to manage it.

When a participant calls for information about our studies, we strive to give them everything they need to make an informed decision about their health, approach to care and benefits and risks of being in any clinical study. Asking questions is very important as well, such as: What is the purpose of the clinical trial? What can you tell me about the drug or device that will be studied? How long will the clinical trial last? What will be done as part of the clinical trial? What actions are required during the clinical trial? What are the risks? What are the possible benefits? Who will see the information that is collected? Once a participant enrolls in a clinical trial, they may also decide to leave the trial at any time and for any reason.

Safety is very important to us. Dr. Wenzel and her research staff take pride in the conduct of these studies and we do our best to provide study participants with courtesy and excellent care. Also, the federal government has regulations to protect research volunteers. All research studies and clinical trials in the United States must be approved and monitored by an institutional review board (IRB). The IRB is made up of scientists, doctors, and community people who continuously review research studies and clinical trials to help make sure that volunteers will be as safe as possible.

Currently there are five clinical trials being conducted at the Asthma Institute. Some are testing innovative ways to treat asthma by focusing on eosinophils or inflammation of the airways. Others look at contributing factors such as obesity. All of our studies collect information about each participant such as asthma history and even lung function. In addition, we are specifically interested in improving the lives of people with severe or difficult to treat asthma.

These studies help participants learn about their asthma and people all over the world with asthma by discovering how asthma works plus develop new asthma medicines. All of the medicines we currently have for asthma treatment were developed through clinical trials.

Information from these studies not only helps the Asthma Institute to develop a better understanding and treatment for asthma; the data is also used by other collaborative centers all over the nation.

To learn more about any or all of our clinical trials, please call our toll free number:

1-866-804-5278 or email us at asthmainstitute@upmc.edu
It is well known that being overweight can substantially increase the risk of many chronic medical conditions, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, metabolic disorders and even depression. However, it did not become evident until recently that excess body weight can adversely influence the respiratory health of asthma patients.

There are many ways that excess body weight can affect lung function including having a smaller amount of air inside the lungs (restriction) due to the inability of the chest wall to fully expand. Also, there are changes in the levels of many substances produced by fat cells which can increase inflammation.

These factors and others may act together to increase airway twitchiness and/or reduce the effectiveness of asthma medications such as inhaled corticosteroids. So the question is: does excess body weight equally impact every patient with asthma?

The answer is no. While excess body weight affects respiratory health in most asthma patients, it is only specific groups of patients where it appears to cause asthma exacerbation or increased asthma severity. This group of susceptible patients is more likely to include adult onset asthmatics and women. Why excess body weight would affect asthma patients differently is unclear, but it is further evidence that not all persons with asthma are the same.

Regardless of whether or not you belong to the group of asthmatics that is most susceptible to severe problems because of excess body weight, the good news is that the majority of studies show that losing weight helps most patients with reducing respiratory symptoms like shortness of breath and wheezing and makes exercise easier.

Talk to your doctor to develop a strategy that includes nutrition and gradual aerobic exercise to help with losing excess weight and/or maintaining a healthy weight; it will help you feel better and lessen your respiratory symptoms.

If you would like to schedule an appointment in our clinic, please call: 412-648-6161.