

Sperm Donation Patient Information

Introduction

Treatment using donated sperm is undertaken for several reasons

- Azoospermia or absence of sperm, which may be as a result of surgery, drug or radiation therapy, or a genetic problem that has stopped the cells in the testes working
- Others consider donor sperm if they have poor quality sperm, problems with fertilisation in the past or risks of passing on an inherited disease.
- Donor sperm may also be used for single women and lesbian couples.

Who are the donors?

Sperm donors are men aged between 18 - 40 years with a good quality sperm. Usually these are not known to you (anonymous). Some people however prefer to ask someone who is known to them, for example a friend or relative. All sperm donors undergo a series of tests to ensure that they are medically suitable to donate. These include; personal and family medical history (to assess whether there could be an inherited condition in the donor's family) and screening for sexually transmitted diseases including Hepatitis and HIV. The sperm is frozen and quarantined for at least six months before the donor is screened again and, only if results are clear, is the sperm released for use.

Can donors claim any costs?

Donors can be paid for their expenses and up to £55.19 per day for actual loss of earnings, with an overall limit of £250.00 for a cycle of donation. They are not allowed to receive a fee.

Choosing a donor

We will try to use sperm from a donor, who matches as closely as possible, the physical characteristics of the male partner. This includes skin, eye and hair colour, height and body build. If you are single, or in a lesbian relationship, the physical characteristics can be matched against your own, or your partners. This does however require a large and constant supply of donors so if it is not possible to find a donor with a close match this will be discussed with you. There is currently a national shortage of donors following legislation to remove their anonymity.

It is also important to know that any child born from donor sperm will be a combination of the male and female characteristics, and therefore the characteristics of the resultant child cannot be predicted or guaranteed.

What is the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA)?

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) is the organisation that regulates the work carried out in IVF clinics.

What is the HFEA Register?

The HFEA Register contains highly confidential information about all people who have undertaken licensed treatment, the donors and the resulting children who are born. Each clinic is legally required to collect certain information about donors. This includes their name, physical characteristics, ethnic origin and family medical history. They are also asked to provide as much information as possible about their interests, hobbies and skills, their decision to become a donor and to write a pen-picture so that any resulting child and family will have a sense of the kind of person they are. For many children, this information will be important to provide a sense of their own identity.

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Any child born as a result of sperm donation will be genetically related to the donor's own children. The law also allows any one donor's sperm to be used to create up to 10 families unless the donor has specified a lower limit. In genetic terms they will be half brothers and sisters. For this reason, the law gives anyone who is planning to marry or have children, the right to contact the HFEA Register and ask whether they are genetically related to their intended marriage partner. (They do not have to be 16 to do this). Once they become 18, they are able to ask whether they were conceived by donation and they can be given non-identifying information about the donor if the parents have not already provided it.

Who can know the name of the donor?

Unless you have chosen to use a donor already known to yourself, you are not able to find out a donor's identity and the donor is not able to know yours.

However, the law changed in April 2005. Now donors cannot be anonymous once the child or children who are conceived from donation reach the age of 18. From that age, people conceived following donation are allowed to ask

- Whether they were conceived by donation
- For the donor's non-identifying information
- For the donor's name and address at time of registration
- For the donor's code number used at the centre where the donation was made.

If a donor-conceived person does ask for the donor's name and contact details, they will first be offered counselling and the HFEA will try to contact the sperm donor to advise him that the information has been requested.

Finally, if a child was born with a disability and it was shown that the disability was a result of a sperm donor failing to inform the clinic of congenital or genetic defects about which he knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that child may be able to seek compensation for damages under the Congenital Disabilities (Civil Liabilities) Act 1973. In these circumstances, information potentially identifying a donor might be disclosed to you.

What information can parents have?

You are able to ask the clinic for the donor's non-identifying information before you use a particular donor. If you were to have a child you can then ask the HFEA Register for:

- The non-identifying information that the donor will have provided
- The number of other children (if any) conceived by the same donor
- The donor's code number used at the centre where the donation was made.

What information can donors have?

The donor may ask about

- The number of children (if any) conceived by their donation
- Whether they are boys or girls
- The year that they were born.

Who are the legal parents?

Any woman who gives birth to a baby is the legal mother. In the case of sperm donation, her partner is the legal father so long as he has given written consent to treatment and they are being treated together as a couple. So,

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your child's birth certificate would state that you are the legal parents. If you are single or in a lesbian relationship, only the birth mother's name would appear on the birth certificate and the father would be noted as 'unknown'.

What should I tell my child?

We encourage people to consider all the implications of the choice between secrecy and being open. This includes considering what is in the best interests of the child and family in the future, thinking carefully about how and when it is best to share this information so that you are well prepared to meet your child's need to know about its origins. We recommend that all of this is discussed with one of our counsellors.

Counselling

The decision about donation involves thinking about all the experiences and possible issues that could occur in the future, as the children grow up. It is also essential that you are fully informed and understand all aspects of sperm donation before you consent to treatment. For these reasons, we will always arrange counselling so that you can talk through the ethical, emotional, legal and practical details of sperm donation. The counsellor will also be able to provide details of support groups and additional written information.

Availability of Donors

We do not currently recruit our own donors at the Agora, and there is a significant shortage nationally. We cannot give an accurate prediction in advance of your booking for treatment but you will have the opportunity of discussing the situation with an embryologist once you have been referred to the clinic and can then consider all potential options

Reserving further samples

If your treatment is successful, you may wish to have the option of a second pregnancy in the future using the same donor's sperm. We strongly recommend that you reserve more samples even if you are not planning another pregnancy at the present time.

If you have a positive pregnancy test, we will write to you to remind you about applying for the purchase of samples for future use.

There is a fee for the purchase of the samples or freezing of a known donor, and a further annual fee for continued storage.

What next?

You need to give yourselves time to consider how you really feel about sperm donation.

Once you feel you want to proceed with treatment, please contact reception to arrange an appointment with one of our consultants. If you have not already been in touch with our counsellor, you will be asked to arrange your first appointment with her.

You will also be given other information about the arrangements for your treatment.