Fertility preservation for men

The aim of this leaflet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about freezing sperm to preserve your fertility. It explains the benefits as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

Recent advances in treatment have meant that a larger number of men can hope to recover from, or be cured of, cancer. However, the chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy used to treat cancer can often affect future fertility or permanently affect the testes.

As it can be difficult to predict whether the cancer treatment will affect your fertility, you may wish to discuss sperm freezing before deciding to have any treatment. Your doctor can refer you to the fertility clinic to produce and store the samples.

What is sperm freezing?
Freezing (cryopreservation) involves storing sperm samples at a very low temperature in liquid nitrogen. Sperm stored in this way can be thawed out at an appropriate time in the future for fertility treatment.

How is sperm collected?
A sperm sample is usually produced by masturbation. This may be embarrassing and difficult for some men. There are facilities within the fertility unit, where you can produce a sample in a separate, private area. In some circumstances it may be possible to produce a sample at home, using the sterile pot provided, to bring it to the fertility clinic. This is only possible if you are able to get the sperm sample back to the clinic within one hour.

Do I need any tests before I can freeze sperm?
There is a theoretical risk of viral cross-contamination between samples that are stored in liquid nitrogen. Although there have been no reported incidences of such cross-contamination between frozen samples, all patients are required to be screened for HIV and Hepatitis B and C before we freeze any sperm samples.

The results of these tests must be available before your samples can be frozen. We currently cannot offer sperm storage if you test positive for HIV or Hepatitis B or C.

Will I be able to discuss sperm freezing with the doctor/nurse?
Before we can store your semen samples, you will have a consultation with a doctor or nurse in the fertility unit to discuss the implications of storing your sperm, and to complete the relevant consent forms. We appreciate that this is likely to be a difficult time for you and we will be happy to answer any queries you may have.

For some men, cancer can affect the quality of the sperm produced. However, you may still want to consider storing it for future use, because even if the quality of the sperm is poor, procedures such as intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI, where a single sperm is injected into each egg) require only a small number of viable...
sperm to fertilise the eggs. The doctor can advise you further when the results of the semen analysis are available.

**Are there legal implications for storing sperm?**

If you are undergoing treatment for cancer, it is important to realise that you may have different immediate and future priorities. You are free to withdraw or vary the terms of your consent at any time.

Under the terms of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (1990), you are required to give **written consent** regarding

1. storage of your sperm.
2. the length of time it may be stored for.
3. the purposes for which your sperm can be used (if you have a partner and propose to have a family with her, she can be named on the form).
4. any stated wishes over any embryos created.
5. what should happen to your sperm sample(s) in the event of your death or if you become incapable of varying or revoking your consent. You may add specific conditions of your choice.

It is important to understand that stored sperm can only be used in the future to treat your wife or partner if you have previously named her in, and signed the appropriate sections of, the HFEA consent forms.

If you do not have a partner when you sign these consent forms, you will not be able to use the samples for treatment of any future partner until you sign new forms, naming your partner.

If your circumstances change, and should you wish to modify them, you must contact us in order to do so. Please telephone us on 020 7188 2300 or 020 7188 7188 and extension 50426 to arrange an appointment to change your consent forms, or for any further consultations.

**What treatments can my sperm be used for?**

When you wish to use your sperm in the future, you may wish to do so through the fertility unit at Guy’s or elsewhere. Sperm can be used in simple insemination procedures, such as intra-uterine insemination (IUI), or more complex assisted conception treatments, such as in vitro fertilisation (IVF) and intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI).

You will be advised on the best procedure to be used depending upon the quality and the quantity of the sperm and your partners medical details.

**How long can my sperm be stored for?**

The statutory maximum time period for storing sperm for medical reasons is 55 years.

Our policy is to store sperm initially for a period of 10 years, after which you must contact us regarding continuation of storage. If you wish to continue to store your sperm after this period, you must contact us in writing and one of the doctors will assess if there is still a medical ground for you to continue storage of sperm.

**Will sperm-freezing be available on the NHS?**

Funding for the freezing and storage of sperm is provided by the NHS (if you are having your cancer treatment in an NHS oncology unit and meet the specific criteria for funding). This will be assessed when your doctor refers you for fertility preservation. Continued storage after this period may incur fee.
It is important that you remain in regular contact with the unit. Please inform us of any change of address or circumstances.

**What is the cost of freezing and storing sperm?**
If your treatment is not being provided by an NHS Oncology unit and/or you do not meet the eligibility criteria for NHS funding, you can still arrange sperm freezing and storage on a self-funded basis.

The fees for the initial consultation, screening tests, freezing and storage of the sperm, can be provided by the fertility unit (ACU)

**Will future fertility treatment be available on the NHS?**
After your cancer therapy, if you require fertility treatment to achieve a pregnancy, your consultant /GP will have to refer you for assisted conception. At the moment, there is no special funding for fertility treatment for couples where either partner has previously had cancer. The eligibility criteria for funding are the same as for any other person seeking fertility treatment. If you do not meet these criteria, fertility treatment will have to be self-funded.

**What happens after my cancer treatment?**
Many men may recover sperm function in the months or years following completion of chemo/radiotherapy. You can be seen in the long-term follow-up clinic to assess whether sperm function has returned. If it has, you may wish to discuss contraception with your doctor. There is no evidence that children conceived naturally of a parent who has had cancer therapy will have an increased risk of abnormalities.

In some men, sperm recovery may never happen, and they will remain infertile. If you have sperm stored, you can return with your partner to discuss fertility treatment. Where cancer therapy has resulted in permanent infertility, and it had not been previously possible to store sperm, you may consider using donated sperm. This can often be a difficult decision, but your fertility doctor will be able to discuss this in detail with you.

**Can my treatment have long-term effects on my fertility?**
We offer long-term follow-up for men whose function of the testes may be affected by the chemo/radiotherapy. However, sexual function can remain normal in the absence of sperm production.

As a result of radiotherapy to the pelvis, head or spine, there may be less testosterone being produced. This can affect sexual function and your health by causing problems such as osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). Treatment with testosterone can reduce these problems. It can be difficult to talk about some of these issues, or you may feel embarrassed to discuss this with your doctor after cancer therapy. Please speak to the specialist nurse or the fertility doctor at this clinic, as help is available.

**Is a counselling service available?**
Apart from the support and advice available to you through the oncology support nurse, a fertility counselling service is available for you and your partner to provide additional support and to discuss the implications on fertility of the chemo/radiotherapy. If you would like to see a counsellor, please contact the Assisted Conception Unit (number at the end of this leaflet).

Please note: It is vitally important that we are able to keep in regular contact with you. You may wish to store sperm for several years, so it is quite possible that you will move during that time. It is your responsibility to ensure we are kept informed of any change in your circumstances, such as a
new address, telephone number or a new partner. If we are unable to contact you to find out whether you want us to continue to store your sperm, by law they will have to be destroyed.

**Useful sources of information**

**Dimbleby Cancer Care** is the cancer support service for Guy’s and St Thomas’. They have drop-in information centres, and also offer complementary therapies, psychological support and benefits advice.  
**t:** 020 7188 5918  
**e:** RichardDimblebyCentre@gstt.nhs.uk

**HFEA** – UK regulating authority of licensed conception and treatment centres.  
**w:** www.hfea.gov.uk

**Infertility Network UK** – National charity providing information and counselling for people with fertility issues  
**w:** www.infertilitynetworkuk.com

**Contact us**  
**Assisted Conception Unit**  
If you have any questions or concerns about fertility preservation please contact  
- Fertility preservation administrator  
  **t:** 020 7188 7188, extension 50426.  
- Oncology fertility liaison nurse  
  **t:** 020 7188 7188, and ask them to bleep 0883.  
- Fertility counsellor: 020 7188 7641 (Please leave a message)  
- Administrative, referral and funding queries  
  please email  
  **e:** ivf.fertilitypreservation@gstt.nhs.uk  
- Medical queries, please email  
  **e:** Fertilitypreservationnurses@gstt.nhs.uk  
- Fax: 02071880490

11th Floor, Tower Wing, Guy’s Hospital, Great Maze Pond, London, SE1 9RT  
**t:** 020 7188 2300  
**fax:** 020 7188 0490  
**w:** www.ivfdirect.com  

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**  
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.  
**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

**Your comments and concerns**  
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.  
**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)  
**e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk  
**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)  
**e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

**Language and accessible support services**  
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.  
**t:** 020 7188 8815  
**e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

**NHS Choices**  
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.  
**w:** www.nhs.uk