

Patient Information Fertility Preservation

Egg Freezing

Introduction

Fertility preservation, specifically egg freezing, is a process that allows you to store your eggs for future use. We understand that family planning might not be your immediate priority. You may be unsure about having children someday, and that's perfectly acceptable. However, this is an important decision, and the timing of certain medical treatments can impact your fertility. Therefore, it's crucial to explore your options now. Understanding the process of egg freezing, its benefits, and the factors to consider will empower you to make informed choices about your future, regardless of whether you envision having children or not. This information is designed to help you navigate these important questions and make the best decision for you.

What is fertility?

Fertility is the ability to have children. For females, egg freezing preserves the option to try for biological children in the future.

Conditions that can affect your fertility

Cancer

Cancer treatments like chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and some surgeries can impact your ovaries' ability to produce eggs and your future chances of pregnancy. The risk to your fertility depends on your age and the specific treatment. Discuss the potential impact on your fertility with your cancer team. If your fertility is at risk, and you hope to have children in the future, consider preserving your fertility by freezing your eggs before starting cancer treatment.

Gender related treatment

Hormone treatment and some gender-related surgeries could make you infertile. This depends on the type of treatment you have. Hormone therapy (puberty blockers or testosterone) suppresses your fertility. In most cases, fertility will recover if you stop hormone treatment; however, in some cases, it is possible that it may not. Surgery to remove the ovaries is irreversible and will make you infertile.

If you think you would like children at some point, you may wish to preserve your fertility by having your eggs frozen and stored for later use in fertility treatment. Often, this is best done before starting hormone treatment, but if you decide on this later, after starting treatment, that should be possible. You might need to stop hormone treatment for a few months.

Other conditions

Some health conditions can affect your ability to have children, sometimes even causing early menopause. For example, conditions like Turner syndrome mosaicism and Galactosaemia can lead to a premature loss of eggs.

Additionally, treatments for other health issues can also damage fertility. If you're facing such a treatment and hope to have children someday, freezing your eggs beforehand could help preserve your fertility.

Front-line armed forces personnel facing deployment to a combat zone can be offered fertility preservation under the NHS.

What is fertility preservation?

Fertility preservation involves collecting and freezing your eggs (egg freezing), so that you have the option to try for children in the future, using those eggs.

If you decide to proceed with a consultation for fertility preservation, you will be referred to the Fertility Centre closest to you, but this may not be your local hospital. Your clinical team and fertility specialists will work together to carefully plan and coordinate your fertility preservation alongside your treatment, ensuring everything is managed smoothly and efficiently.

What is involved in egg freezing?

Egg freezing is a method of preserving your fertility by storing your eggs before cancer or other treatment begins. Egg freezing involves a few steps:

- You'll get hormone injections to encourage your ovaries to produce multiple eggs.
- Your progress will be monitored with ultrasound scans and blood tests.
- When the eggs are mature, they'll be collected during a short surgical procedure during which you will receive sedation.
- The mature eggs are then frozen and stored.

Are there any side effects?

Young women's ovaries often respond well to fertility drugs, which can increase the risk of ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS) although there is a small risk to all. OHSS is a potentially serious reaction to the hormone injections where overstimulated ovaries enlarge and release chemicals that can cause blood vessels to leak.

We minimize this risk by carefully selecting the type and dose of hormone injections. Around one-third of individuals experience mild OHSS, which can usually be managed at home with pain relief and prescribed medication for a few days.

How long will I be in hospital for?

You can normally go home one to two hours after the egg collection procedure. Some light bleeding is normal, and any abdominal discomfort usually subsides within 12 hours with pain relief.

Who is eligible for NHS egg storage?

To qualify for NHS egg storage, it does not matter whether you are single or in a relationship, but you must meet specific criteria for fertility preservation. In Scotland, the current eligibility requirements are:

- You must be under 40 years of age.
- Your BMI must be under 35.
- You must not have any biological children.
- You must not have undergone sterilisation.

However, separate criteria apply to access NHS-funded fertility treatment to use your stored eggs in the future. These criteria may change over time, and it is not possible to predict what the requirements will be in the years to come.

What will happen when I see the fertility specialist?

During the appointment, the doctor or specialist nurse will explain the available options for preserving your fertility and answer any questions you may have. If there is enough time to complete fertility preservation before beginning your cancer or other treatment, the specialist will discuss the relevant procedures with you.

If you choose to proceed, the specialist will guide you through the process and, you will need to complete the required paperwork (including recent travel history) and consent forms for the treatment and storage of your eggs. You will also undergo a blood test to check for infections. These steps are necessary to ensure your eggs can be safely stored, meeting regulatory requirements for potential future use.

If we determine that your eggs cannot be frozen, we will inform you and discuss the options, if appropriate.

What are the legal implications of storing eggs?

In the UK, the use and storage of eggs are regulated by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). Under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act (1990), you must provide written consent for the following:

- The storage of your eggs
- The duration for which your eggs can be stored
- The purposes for which your eggs can be used
- Your wishes regarding the stored eggs
- What should happen to your eggs in the event of your death or if you become unable to change or withdraw your consent (these are standard questions for all patients considering fertility preservation)

The maximum storage period for your eggs is currently 55 years, but consent must be renewed every 10 years.

Once your eggs are stored, it is crucial to maintain communication with the storage centre. Notify them immediately of any changes to your contact details, such as a new address, to ensure they can stay in touch with you. If the storage centre cannot contact you they may no longer be legally permitted to store your eggs and will be required to discard them.

It is important to let the centre know about any changes in partnership status or name changes, as new consent forms may need to be completed to continue with storage.

If you have a partner and you wish to allow your partner to use your eggs in the event of your death, you must complete specific consent forms with the storage centre to authorise this.

If you decide to stop storing your eggs, you will need to contact the storage centre to arrange for them to be discarded.

Will my treatment have to be postponed if I choose egg freezing?

Egg freezing typically takes two to three weeks to complete. If your treatment can be safely delayed for this period, your specialist can refer you to discuss fertility preservation options, including egg freezing. However, if your treatment needs to start urgently, there may not be enough time to complete egg freezing before beginning treatment. In these situations, other options might be considered. Please see below for information on using donor eggs or adoption.

What if I don't want to proceed at this stage?

If you decide not to proceed with egg freezing at this stage, that is perfectly acceptable. The decision is entirely yours. It's natural to feel uncertain, and taking more time to think things over is perfectly reasonable. If you're unsure, it may help to talk it through with your healthcare team, fertility specialist, or a counsellor to better understand your options. Opting out of egg freezing will not impact your treatment, and you can explore other options to build a family in the future if you change your mind.

Are there any alternatives if I can't freeze my eggs before treatment starts?

If you decide not to freeze your eggs before your treatment or it is not possible before starting cancer or other treatment, fertility options may be limited in the future. There are still alternative ways to build a family. Please see below for information on using donor eggs or adoption.

Can I have fertility treatments after recovering from treatment?

Depending on how your fertility is affected, you might still be able to have fertility treatments after you recover. If your ovaries start producing eggs again, fertility treatment using your own eggs could be an option. If using your own eggs isn't possible, you could talk about other options:

- **Using Donor Eggs:** If you can't produce eggs after cancer treatment, using donor eggs for fertility treatments might be an option when you're ready to start a family.
- **Adoption:** Adoption is another way to have children. You can explore it at any time, and it offers a path to parenthood if having a biological child isn't possible.

It's important to talk about these alternatives with your fertility specialist and healthcare team so you can choose the best option for your medical situation, treatment plan, and family goals. Each option has different things to consider, and your healthcare team can give you personalised guidance.

What is ovarian tissue freezing?

Ovarian tissue freezing is a way to preserve your fertility where a small piece of ovarian tissue, which contains immature eggs, is surgically removed (keyhole surgery) and frozen. This can be an option for young women when egg freezing isn't possible. Currently, using this tissue means having another surgery to put it back into your body.

Will I get fertility testing after treatment?

There's no single test that can definitively say if your fertility has fully returned. While getting your period back regularly is a good sign, it doesn't guarantee you're fertile.

Who can help me decide what to do?

Your doctors and nurses can offer guidance as you make this decision about egg freezing. Visiting the fertility centre doesn't mean you have to go ahead with egg freezing, but it will give you the chance to explore your options fully.

It's also important to lean on your usual support network, such as family, friends or community support groups to help you decide what's best for you.

Counsellors, while not directly involved in your medical care, can offer valuable support in helping you decide whether to proceed with fertility preservation, including egg freezing, and provide additional emotional support throughout the process.

How can I access fertility counselling?

If time allows, you will have the opportunity to meet with one of our fertility counsellors before proceeding with egg freezing. All of our counsellors are members of the British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA). During your session, the counsellor will discuss your options and help you explore your thoughts and feelings about freezing your eggs. It is also a chance for you to ask any questions you may have.

Please note that counselling is not part of the assessment process and will not affect your treatment. If you would like additional support, further counselling appointments are available before, during, or after your treatment.

Can I change my mind?

Yes, you can change your mind at any time. It's normal to feel uncertain or anxious about the process, and speaking with a counsellor or fertility doctor can help you work through your feelings. However, having these discussions does not obligate you to proceed with fertility preservation.

Do I need to use contraception?

While treatment may affect your fertility, it is impossible to know for certain whether you can still conceive. Some treatments can damage eggs, which could potentially affect a pregnancy if conception occurs during treatment. Therefore, it is vital to prevent pregnancy if you are sexually active during treatment and for up to a year after your treatment ends.

It is equally important to practice safe sex to protect yourself and your partner from sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Using a condom during sexual activity is strongly recommended to ensure both your safety and your partner's.

What do I do when I wish to use the stored eggs?

You need to contact your GP to ask for a referral to your local fertility centre, preferably the one where your eggs are stored.

It's also important to note that additional criteria must be met to access NHS fertility treatment using your stored eggs in the future. These criteria may change over time, and it is not possible to predict what the requirements will be in the years to come. Current criteria can be found here - [Access Criteria NHS IVF Treatment Scotland – Fertility Network](#).

Want to Find Out More? – Useful Contacts and Websites

If you would like to learn more about fertility preservation or access support, the following resources may be helpful:

- **HFEA Website: Egg Freezing**
[Egg freezing | HFEA](#)
- **HFEA Website: Fertility Preservation**
[Fertility preservation | HFEA](#)
- **HFEA: Information for Trans and Non-Binary People**
[Information for trans and non-binary people seeking fertility treatment | HFEA](#)
- **British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA)**
[BICA: Professional Infertility Counselling Association in the UK](#) – Provides specialised counselling for individuals undergoing fertility treatment and preservation.
- **Macmillan Cancer Support**
[Macmillan Cancer Support](#) – Macmillan provide information, support and guidance, to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can.
- **Teenage Cancer Trust**
[Teenage Cancer Trust](#) – Teenage Cancer Trust provide specialised nursing care and support for young people with cancer. Supporting anyone diagnosed with cancer aged 13-24, and their loved ones too.
- **Cancer Research UK: Fertility and Cancer**
[Cancer and Fertility | Cancer Research UK](#) – Comprehensive information on how cancer treatments can impact fertility and the options available.
- **Clic Sargent (Young Lives vs Cancer)**
[The six ways we help - Young Lives vs Cancer](#) and [Young Lives vs Cancer](#) – Support for children and young adults with cancer, including information on fertility preservation.
- **Gendered Intelligence**
[Gendered Intelligence](#) – Supports trans individuals, particularly young people, in navigating gender identity and related challenges.
- **GIRES (Gender Identity Research & Education Society)**
[Gender Identity Research & Education Society](#) – Offers guidance and advocacy for trans and gender-diverse individuals and their families.
- **Scots Trans and Equality Network**
[Scottish Trans](#) – Works to improve gender identity and gender reassignment equality, rights and inclusion in Scotland. Scottish Trans is part of the [Equality Network](#) which works to improve LGBTQI+ equality, rights and inclusion in Scotland.

- **LGBT Health and Wellbeing**

[LGBT Health and Wellbeing](#) – Works to improve the physical, social, and mental health and wellbeing of LGBTQ+ adults (16+) in Scotland.

- **LGBT Youth Scotland**

[LGBT Youth Scotland](#) – Scotland's national charity for LGBTQ+ young people, aged 13-25.

- **The Fertility Alliance**

[The Fertility Alliance](#) – A national fertility charity offering support and accurate information for anyone who wants to know more about their fertility.

- **Fertility Network UK**

[Fertility Network UK](#) – A charity providing support and information on all aspects of fertility, including preservation options.

- **NHS Fertility Services**

[Infertility | NHS inform](#) – Guidance on NHS fertility services and infertility information.

- **British Fertility Society**

[For the public » British Fertility Society](#) – Information on fertility and fertility preservation.



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