

# **Patient Information Fertility Preservation Sperm Freezing**

# Introduction

Fertility preservation, specifically sperm freezing, is a process that allows you to store your sperm 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 sperm 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. In males, it requires producing healthy sperm in the testes and sperm freezing preserves the option to have biological children in the future.

## Conditions that can affect your fertility

### Cancer

Cancer treatment, including chemotherapy, radiotherapy, and some kinds of surgery, can affect how well your testes produce sperm. The potential impact on your sperm depends on the type of treatment you will be receiving. It's important to talk to your cancer team about the likely effects of your treatment.

If you think you would like children at some point and you haven't started cancer treatment, you may wish to preserve your fertility by having your sperm frozen and stored for later use in fertility 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 oestrogen) suppresses your fertility and, over time, may lead to a complete loss of fertility. In most cases, fertility will recover if you stop hormone treatment; however, in some cases, it does not. Surgery to remove the testes is irreversible and will make you infertile. Removal of the penis means sperm cannot be released.

If you think you would like children at some point, you may wish to preserve your fertility by having your sperm 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. Depending on the case, you might need to stop hormone treatment for a few months.

### Other conditions

Other medical conditions may require the use of treatments that are damaging to fertility, so you may wish to consider fertility preservation.

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 sperm (sperm freezing), so that you have the option to have children in the future, using that sperm.

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 sperm freezing?

Sperm freezing is a method of preserving your fertility by storing sperm before cancer or other treatment begins. To provide a sample for freezing, you will need to masturbate and ejaculate into a sterile container.

Once you have produced your sperm sample, the laboratory team will contact you to inform you about its quality and whether it is suitable for freezing. If time allows, they may recommend providing a second sample to improve the chances of successful fertility preservation.

There is no guarantee that any given semen sample will be suitable for storage. Illness, previous treatments, or other factors can affect sperm production. If this occurs, it may not be possible to freeze the sperm successfully. The only way to confirm this is by laboratory examination of the sperm sample.

### How long will I be in for?

The time required for sperm collection and processing is typically brief, usually taking less than an hour. You can usually go home shortly after providing your sample.

## Who is eligible for NHS-funded sperm storage?

To qualify for NHS-funded sperm 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 53 years of age.
- 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 sperm 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 sperm freezing 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 talk you through the relevant procedures.

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 sperm. You will also undergo a blood test to check for infections. These steps are necessary to ensure your sperm can be safely stored, meeting regulatory requirements for potential future use.

# What are the legal implications of storing sperm?

In the UK, the use and storage of sperm 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 sperm
- The duration for which your sperm can be stored
- The purposes for which your sperm can be used
- Your wishes regarding the stored sperm
- What should happen to your sperm 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 sperm is 55 years but consent must be renewed every 10 years.

Once your sperm is 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 sperm and will be required to discard the sample/s.

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 sperm 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 sperm, you will need to contact the storage centre to arrange for it to be discarded. Additionally, the fertility centre may schedule follow-up appointments to check whether you are still producing sperm. If you are, the NHS may no longer cover the cost of ongoing sperm storage.

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

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

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

If you decide not to proceed with sperm 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 sperm 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 sperm before treatment starts?

If you decide not to freeze your sperm 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 sperm 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 treatment after you recover. If your testes start producing sperm again, fertility treatment using your own sperm could be an option. If using your own sperm isn't possible and you did not freeze sperm before treatment, you could talk about other options:

- **Using Donor Sperm:** If you can't produce sperm after treatment, using donor sperm 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.

## Will I get fertility testing after treatment?

After completing treatment, fertility testing may help determine if you are still producing viable sperm. We usually advise waiting 12 months after completing treatment before having this test. There's no single test that can definitively say if your fertility has fully returned. A semen analysis can assess sperm count, motility, and morphology, but even a 'normal' result doesn't guarantee fertility.

# Who can help me decide what to do?

Your doctors and nurses can offer guidance as you make this decision about sperm freezing. Visiting the fertility centre doesn't mean you have to go ahead with sperm 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 sperm 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 sperm 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 sperm. 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, these discussions do 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 father a child. Some treatments can damage sperm, 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 sperm?

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

It's also important to note that additional criteria must be met to access NHS fertility treatment using your stored sperm 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: Sperm Freezing**  
[Sperm 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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