



# A MAN'S GUIDE TO FERTILITY TREATMENT



# A man's guide to fertility treatment

Fertility treatment can be stressful – not just for women, but for men too. It's tough feeling like you're stood on the sidelines watching your partner go through so much, and it can be tougher still to ask for help or advice if you need it.

That's why IVI has put together this handy guide, a kind of roadmap of what to expect and a way to address some of the worries you might have along the way. From finding out there's a problem, through giving a sperm sample and coping during your treatment, to how to take care of yourself and your partner, what happens to your sex life and what to do if something goes wrong, we've got it covered.

The guide was put together using an expert team, including a leading consultant in reproductive medicine, a fertility nurse and a Specialist Fertility Counsellor from IVI. You'll also hear from Ian, a dad who underwent two cycles of IVF, and now has seven-year-old twin boys to show for it. It should give you a real insight into the process, as well as some genuinely helpful tips.

Most of all, we hope our guide makes going through fertility treatment a little bit easier for you. But remember this is just an overview, all IVI clinics offer specialist counselling for men and at the back of this book you will find a list of further resources where you can get more information, support and advice.



50♂

of cases of infertility are due,  
at least in part, to male problems<sup>ii</sup>

# What's the problem?

When you find out you can't have a baby naturally, it's normal to feel angry, sad, shocked or all three. You might also adopt that classic position of 'ignoring it and hoping it goes away'. It can be particularly tough to cope if the problem is down to you, so it might help to know that half of cases of fertility problems are caused, at least in part, by male problems.

The most common cause of male infertility problems is difficulty making good quality sperm. This could be due to a low sperm count, sperm that don't move properly or sperm that have an abnormal shape. In each case, it makes it harder for them to fertilise an egg.<sup>iv</sup>

Whatever you might have heard, you're far from the only man facing this issue. And you're not alone.

# 69%

of men are very apprehensive about undergoing IVF<sup>iii</sup>



1 IN 7

couples in the UK have trouble conceiving<sup>i</sup>

**"It's almost a taboo subject. As a man, you feel like you've let the side down if you can't make a baby naturally, but there shouldn't be that stigma attached to it. It's nobody's fault and no one should feel guilty about it"**

Ian, 40, IVF dad

## Getting your head round the problem

There's no getting away from the fact that some men feel it makes them 'less of a man' if they can't get their partner pregnant naturally.<sup>v</sup> It doesn't.

If the issue does lie with you, you can also feel guilty that you're putting your partner through the process of IVF. It can also feel like everything is geared up to support your partner and there is nothing for you.

There's no shame in feeling this way or needing a bit of help to get you through.

Fortunately, there are lots of ways to get it. If you can, talk things through with your partner as research shows that for most men the one thing they wished they had done during IVF is been more open with their partner.<sup>vi</sup> However, if it feels like you're just making things worse by sharing your worries with her, try to find a good friend or family member to talk to. You can even visit an online forum to chat to other men going through the same thing. There are a few listed at the end of this booklet.

All IVI clinics also offer nurse consultations where you can ask questions about the practicalities of your treatment, as well as counseling services to talk to a trained therapist about how you feel, either on your own or with your partner.

# Giving your sperm sample

Even though you may have given a sperm sample during your initial tests, you will have to provide another one on the day your partner's eggs are collected. This sperm ideally needs to be fresh, so it is in peak condition to fertilise the eggs. But as we all know, it's not always easy to perform under time pressure!

**"If you're worried about it, this is not a time to be shy. If you admit that you might find it difficult to provide a sample, the clinic can make it easier for you"**

Mr Tony Rutherford,  
Executive Director, IVI UK

If you're stressing out about it, speak up as soon as possible and let the medical staff know. There are lots of things that can be done to make the whole process easier.

Here are some tips to help put your mind (and anywhere else) at ease about producing a sample.<sup>viii,ix</sup>



**You get quite a big pot for your sample. This is because you need to catch everything you ejaculate, as the first bit is the most sperm rich. Don't worry if what you produce doesn't look like much, most men only ejaculate around 1.5ml of sperm, which is about a teaspoon worth.<sup>vii</sup> That's all you need!**



You can bring along your own material



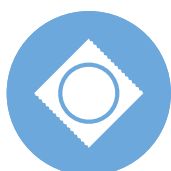
You can wear headphones to blank out the noise of the clinic



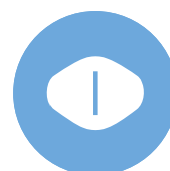
You can make your sample at home or in a nearby hotel, as long as you can deliver it to the clinic within one hour



If you plan ahead, your partner may be able to join you



If you need to have sex to get a sample, it can be collected in a special lubricant and spermicide-free condom



You can ask for Viagra to help

Even if none of these work, you can have a sample frozen before the treatment (although fresh sperm is preferable), or sperm can be extracted from the testicles using a syringe.

# When the going gets tough

Fertility treatment can feel like it's all about the woman<sup>xiii</sup>, but it's tough on men too. It's natural to feel low when you're going through such a stressful time, or try to bury your head in the sand. Often, men avoid talking to their partner as they don't want to put an extra burden on her, even though she is the one person who really understands what they're going through. That can mean they bottle things up instead.

Here are a few tips to help you stay positive during treatment<sup>xiv</sup>:

- It's OK to be selfish sometimes and look after yourself, in fact it's crucial if you want to stay strong to be there for your partner
- Cutting back on excessive drinking is a good idea, but a pint or two with your mates could be just the break you need
- Keep up exercise and activities like your weekly football match or game of golf
- Keep talking to your partner or to a supportive friend or family member
- Take time out to relax. You could even give meditation or breathing exercises a try to de-stress. There are lots of apps you can download to help you get started
- Get a good night's sleep. If you're having trouble sleeping, look online or ask the clinic counsellor for tips
- Talk to a clinic counsellor or a therapist if you're struggling to cope as they can give you lots of strategies to help.

7 IN 10 

men have felt like giving up on IVF because of the negative emotional impact\*



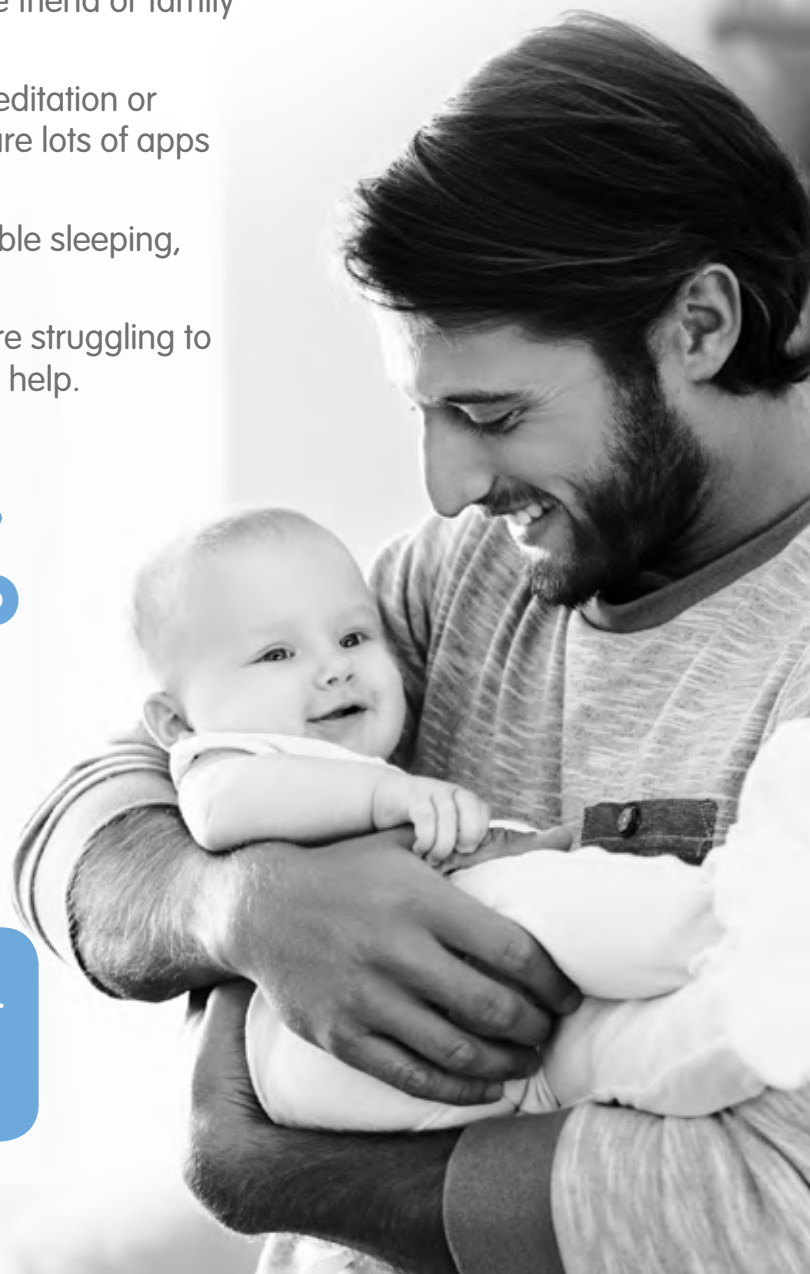
Almost **half of men** spoke about their personal emotional experience **less than once a month** during IVF<sup>xi</sup>

59%

of men wish they'd been more open with their partner during treatment<sup>xii</sup>

**"I felt that because I was the man I just had to get on with it, but as the process went on it was really mentally demanding"**

Ian, 40, IVF dad



# Making yourself useful


One of the most important jobs you have during fertility treatment is just being there for your partner when she needs you. Treatment is often more invasive for a woman and you can help by offering support. This can also help to make you feel more of a part of the process.

During treatment there are lots of things you can do, but it can be helpful to pre-arm yourself with all the information you need to ensure you're aware when there might be tricky times ahead.

Most couples undergo something called 'long protocol IVF', which lasts around five weeks. This starts by suppressing hormones, so the clinic can control when a woman ovulates and lasts around 2-3 weeks, during which time she needs daily injections that put her into a menopausal state. Some women experience symptoms like hot flushes, mood swings, headaches and insomnia.<sup>xv</sup>

As you can imagine this can make your partner feel pretty bad, so it may be a time when you will need to be on hand to provide extra support.

A tip to help make things a bit easier for her is to learn how to do the injections for her. It's one less thing for her to worry about and a way for you to stay involved in the treatment.



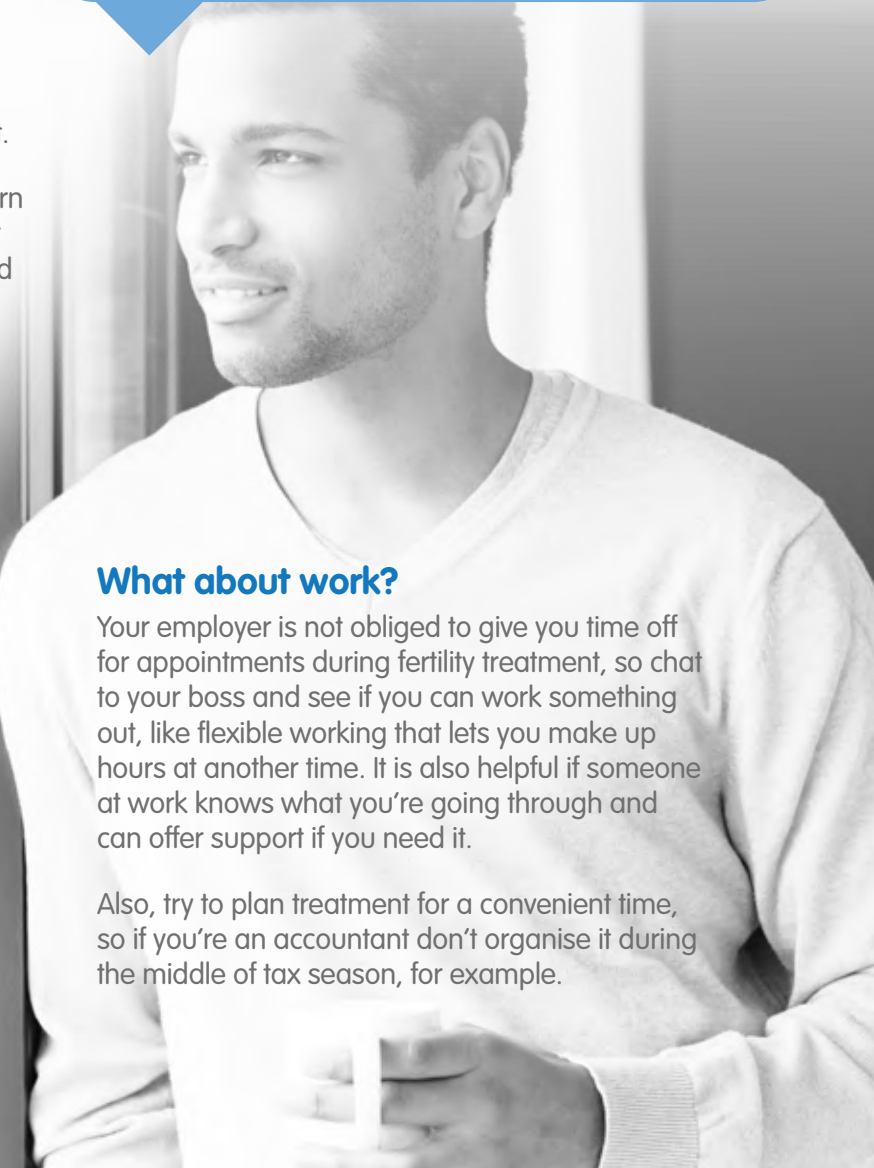
**"By going to every scan, I knew what was going on, instead of relying on third-hand information and it made us into a real team"**

Ian, 40, IVF dad

## Here are a few more ways you can stay involved:<sup>xvi</sup>

- Plan questions for medical staff together before appointments
- Try to attend all her appointments
- Book a counselling session together
- Take notes and ask questions during appointments
- If you can't go along to appointments, ask questions afterwards to find out what happened
- Make questions open-ended, like 'Did you find out anything new?' rather than just 'Was it all OK?'

## What about work?



Your employer is not obliged to give you time off for appointments during fertility treatment, so chat to your boss and see if you can work something out, like flexible working that lets you make up hours at another time. It is also helpful if someone at work knows what you're going through and can offer support if you need it.

Also, try to plan treatment for a convenient time, so if you're an accountant don't organise it during the middle of tax season, for example.

# Let's talk about sex

For many couples, by the time they reach a fertility clinic, sex has turned into a chore that's all about ovulation schedules and baby-making, and nothing to do with romance or fun. This can have a really big impact on both men and women, as sex is often a way for couples to express closeness.

While its not advised to have sex ahead of egg collection, there are ways to stay physically close. Kissing, cuddling, holding hands, going on a date together and staying intimate with each other are all great ways to keep the love alive.

Some women may experience side effects from the treatment, such as dryness, which can make sex uncomfortable.<sup>xviii</sup> If that's the case, mention it to the medical staff and they can offer advice on how to manage this.

Things will usually gradually improve with time, once your treatment is finished, but if you're still experiencing sexual problems, it might be worth contacting a counsellor who is trained to support couples with these issues. Just like the whole process of IVF, there's nothing unmanly about asking for help.



## TIP:

It is a good idea to ejaculate regularly – at least every five days – to keep sperm in tip top condition.<sup>xvii</sup> The good news is there is no reason why this should only be through masturbation.

# What if something goes wrong?

While fertility treatment offers real hope for couples – IVF has already helped to bring 125,000 babies into the world<sup>xix</sup> – sometimes things go wrong. These setbacks can be heartbreaking, whether it's a negative pregnancy test or a miscarriage, and they can cause tension between couples.

Women often find it easier to talk about their sadness, but sometimes couples get angry or blame one another. There may also be disagreements about when to try again or whether to do so at all.

There are some things you can do to help you get through these disappointments, including:<sup>xx</sup>

- Talk together about your sadness at the failed treatment
- Express your fears about the future
- Give each other space to grieve before moving on
- Take a break before making any decisions, such as a weekend away or a holiday to reconnect

**“When our first cycle of IVF failed it was a very stressful time, because we’d put so much hope and effort into it. It was an emotional time, but it certainly brought us closer together and made us stronger in the end”**  
Ian, 40, IVF dad

If you really can't agree about whether or not to undergo more treatment, don't keep arguing with each other. Instead try to find someone else like a friend, family member or therapist, who can help you find a way forward - together.





# The 10 Key Stages of IVF

The IVF process usually takes between 4-6 weeks. Here are 10 key moments to prepare for.



1. The first consultation



2. Tests, screening and scans



3. The paperwork



4. Developing your IVF treatment plan



5. Egg preparation and collection



6. Giving sperm



7. Fertilisation of eggs



8. Embryo transfer



9. The two-week wait



10. Pregnancy test...and results

There's lots more information available about every stage of IVF in the IVI Patient Handbook, which we automatically provide to everyone who visits us.

Or you can contact one of our experts for an informal chat on:

**0333 015 9774**



# Useful links for more information:

## **HFEA – The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority**

[www.hfea.gov.uk](http://www.hfea.gov.uk)

The UK's independent regulator of fertility treatment and research

## **Fertility Network UK**

<http://fertilitynetworkuk.org>

The UK's leading infertility support network

## **BICA – British Infertility Counselling Association**

[www.bica.net](http://www.bica.net)

Includes search facility to find local specialist fertility counsellors

## **British Fertility Society**

<http://tinyurl.com/BFS-patient-info>

Patient friendly professional information

## **Fertility Zone**

[www.fertilityzone.co.uk](http://www.fertilityzone.co.uk)

Website and forum with general fertility support and discussion

## **Men's Fertility**

[www.mensfe.net](http://www.mensfe.net)

Information and support around men's fertility

## **IVF World**

[www.ivfworld.com](http://www.ivfworld.com)

IVF fertility patients network and online community

## **Fertility Friends**

[www.fertilityfriends.co.uk](http://www.fertilityfriends.co.uk)

Supporting assisted conception, parenting, adoption and surrogacy

## **Fertility UK**

[www.fertilityuk.co.uk](http://www.fertilityuk.co.uk)

General fertility information

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- vi** IVI Research Report, February 2017
- vii** Interview transcript, Mr Tony Rutherford, 11 April 2017
- viii** IVI Patient Information Booklet & Interview Transcript, Aoife Oregan, 11 April 2017
- ix** Interview transcript, Mr Tony Rutherford, 11 April 2017
- x** IVI Research Report, February 2017
- xi** IVI Research Report, February 2017
- xii** IVI Research Report, February 2017
- xiii** Joja O. D., Dinu D., Paun D., 2014. Psychological aspects of male infertility. An overview. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 1, 87 ( 2015 ), 359 – 363.
- xiv** Interview transcript, Helen Swords, 19 April 2017
- xv** IVI Patient Information Booklet & Interview Transcript, Aoife Oregan, 11 April 2017
- xvi** Interview transcript, Helen Swords, 19 April 2017
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- xx** Interview transcript, Helen Swords, 19 April 2017





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