

SEMEN DONATION

PATIENT INFORMATION

Introduction

Semen donation is a very important part of fertility treatment. Couples who use semen donation as a form of treatment usually have almost no chance of becoming pregnant without this option. The gift of donated semen can thus be one of the greatest gifts of all, giving the recipients a chance, that they would otherwise be very unlikely to have, of becoming parents.

However, semen donation is also a particularly emotional and complex form of treatment and becoming a semen donor has serious long-term implications for the donor and his own family. It is for this reason that we, at IVFAustralia, follow a meticulous process of preparation for donor insemination. This process involves thorough medical assessment, detailed testing and extended counselling of all parties involved in the semen donation, including both of the recipients, the donor and the donor's family.

In the past, donor insemination was based on the principle of anonymity. In contrast, a much more open approach is, nowadays, favoured. All semen donors are now required to make their identity available to the children conceived from semen donation when they reach 18 years. One consequence of this is that there are fewer semen donors now available and we have had to set up a carefully organised system, including a waitlist, to ensure fair and non-discriminatory access of women to treatment with semen donation.

The most important aspect of preparation for semen donation, and the purpose of this information document, is to ensure that everyone involved makes the right decisions for themselves and their family: decisions that they will be comfortable with in the long term future. We do hope that this booklet will help you in making the right decision for you.

GENERAL INFORMATION

What is semen donation?

Semen donation refers to the use of semen, which has been donated by a third person or 'donor' to assist an individual or couple, known as 'recipient(s)', in their attempt to become parents. Donors are classified as either '**known**' or '**de-identified**' depending on the type of relationship between the Donor and Recipient(s).

Known semen donation is where the identity of the donor is known by the recipient(s) and commonly where the donor and recipient have an existing relationship. A known donor may be a friend, colleague or family member. The donated semen is thus only used for the treatment of one (or more) specific individuals. (Known semen donation is covered in a separate booklet (**SEMEN DONATION FROM A KNOWN SEMEN DONOR**)).

De-identified semen donation is where the identity of the donor is not known to any recipient, although identifying information will be made available for later access by the offspring once they reach the age of 18 years. The donated semen is available for treatment of any IVFAustralia patient and up to 10 families can be created from one donor.

The donor must give explicit written consent to providing identifying information to any offspring from his donation once they reach 18 years of age. He must also give written informed consent to his name being included on a NSW state donor register should one be established.

It is a national requirement in Australia that all donated semen samples must be kept quarantined (frozen) for six months and will not be released for treatment of recipients until follow-up testing (as below) is complete.

Who can be a semen donor?

IVFAustralia adheres to the practices that have been developed by the Reproductive Technology Accreditation Committee (RTAC) of the Fertility Society of Australia (FSA) and the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC). These practices emphasise the importance of the future welfare of any child born from donor gametes or embryos. Medical and counselling appointments and the provision of information to semen donors and recipients before a donation or treatment proceeds, will always consider the best interests of the future child.

All semen donors at IVFAustralia are required to:

- be older than 18 years of age; and
- be shown by, blood tests before and after six months of quarantining of the semen samples, to be free of any serious infections or genetic conditions; and
- have no record of serious criminal activity, including imprisonment; and
- have no record of convictions for offences against children; and
- be less than 46 years of age; and
- have never previously donated at any other fertility clinic; and
- have no past or current history of significant mental health problems; and
- have no medical conditions or illnesses, either himself or in his family that may be passed on to future children.

Donors are required to undergo rigorous blood screening and to sign a lifestyle declaration as part of RTAC and The Human Tissue Act. This is to try and prevent any potential infections and genetic conditions from being transmitted to either the recipient(s) or any children conceived.

With all donors, it may become apparent during the assessment process that a man is unsuitable on medical grounds to be a semen donor. When this arises, the issues will first be discussed with the donor. Health or other confidential information about the donor will not be passed onto any recipient without the written consent of the donor. However, if the information would have serious implications for the health of either the recipient or any children and the donor is unwilling to give written consent for this information to be given to recipients, it may not be possible for the donation to proceed.

Legal issues

Under current NSW law, a child born from donated sperm is deemed to be the child of the recipient couple and as such, it is permissible, and usual, to put the male partner's name on the birth certificate. However, this is a complex area of the law. If you have any concerns in this regard, you should seek your own legal advice. IVFAustralia is not qualified to provide legal advice.

Social Issues

- The welfare of the child is important and this includes any current children of the recipients or donors
- Current research and the experiences of offspring conceived through donation suggest that children should be told of their biological origins and that secrecy can have adverse effects on family relationships.
- Advice on how and when to tell children about their genetic origins is available from your counsellor

Medical Issues

- The donor is entitled to all results of his blood tests and investigations. If new medical information about the donor arises during the course of the assessment, medical and counselling support will be provided.
- If IVFAustralia becomes aware of any hereditary medical or genetic condition arising in either a donor or any child, other families created through that donor's semen will also be notified.

BECOMING A SEMEN DONOR

How can I become a semen donor?

If you are interested in becoming a de-identified semen donor, please contact us at IVFAustralia on **1800 111 483** and we will be pleased to arrange for our Donor Co-ordinator to talk to you on the telephone about becoming a semen donor.

It is very important that there is thorough preparation for becoming a known semen donor. This preparation has a number of important objectives.

- You will have a medical consultation to check your health and record everything we need to know about your past and present health.
- We will put you through a thorough counselling process. It is vital that you fully understand the implications of becoming a semen donor, that you understand the issues that lie ahead and that you make the decision that is right for you in the long term.
- **Genetic Counselling.** We will contact you to arrange a suitable time for you to have a telephone consultation with our genetic counsellor. Genetic counselling is very important as it is vital that we record everything we know about the health of your families so that if a child conceived from your embryos has any health problems later, we have a good record of their past illnesses in their family.

For this reason, we strongly encourage you to help us by gathering as much detailed family medical history information as possible for yourself and your extended family (including siblings, children, parents, grandparents etc) and to identify:

- Ages or dates of birth, and for those family members who have passed on, age at death and cause of death. *Include miscarriages, stillbirths and neonatal deaths.*
- Known genetic conditions.
- Medical concerns such as Cancer, Heart Disease, Diabetes, Asthma, Mental Illness, High Blood Pressure, Stroke, Kidney Disease, Alcoholism, others. *Be specific with the type of condition and age at onset.*
- Birth Defects such as Spina Bifida, Cleft Lip, Heart Defects, Others.
- Learning Problems, Mental Retardation.
- Vision loss/hearing loss at a young age (record the age of diagnosis).

Armed with such insight, a genetic counsellor will assess your family medical history information in conjunction with your routine donor screening test results to help you understand any inheritable concerns that may be significant to the donation process and the possible pregnancy outcomes.

- We will then need you to undergo some blood and urine tests so that we check for any possible infections or genetic conditions that might otherwise be passed onto the recipient or her child.
- We also need to check the quality of your semen so that we understand the best way of using it to help achieve a pregnancy in the recipient.

- Finally, we will see you for a followup medical appointment to go through your results with you and to sign the relevant consent forms with you.

Do remember that all the information collected by us in the course of the medical assessment, the testing and the counselling is strictly confidential and nothing will be passed onto the recipient without your written permission.

All test results and their findings will be discussed with you. If anything arises during the assessment process that could have serious implications for the health of either yourself, the donor or any child conceived, the doctor will discuss with you whether you are prepared to consent to release of that information to the recipient. In some circumstances if the information is serious and you decide not to release that information, it may not be possible to proceed with the semen donation.

How many samples am I required to collect?

For de-identified donors, whose samples will be used to create up to ten families, we normally aim to collect 10-12 separate semen samples, although sometimes more may be required.

Can I be paid to be a semen donor?

No. It is illegal in Australia to receive or make any type of payment for human tissue, including semen. IVFAustralia will pay expenses directly incurred in making the donation (e.g. travel, parking) but will not compensate donors for lost time at work.

What information are semen donors entitled to have about either the recipients any family born from their donation?

Semen donors are entitled to non-identifying information about the families and any offspring born. On request a semen donor is entitled to know:

- Age and occupations of the recipients
- Ethnic origin of the recipients
- Number and gender of children born to each family using his donation

What information about the semen donor is given to offspring or recipient(s)?

Prior to beginning treatment with donor semen, a recipient will be given non-identifying medical and social information about the donor that helps them make an informed decision about whether to proceed. This includes:

- Relevant medical history summary
- A questionnaire completed by the donor (e.g. eye colour, personality traits, education, ethnicity etc)
- Date of semen collection and suitability for different modalities of treatment
- Last date of contact with the donor

Once the offspring turn 18 years of age they will be entitled to identifying information about their donor, in those cases where the donor has signed a Consent Form to allow this disclosure. All new semen donors must consent to this release of information to be accepted onto the donor programme.

Can de-identified donors place restriction on who receives their semen sample?

No. Donors are not normally allowed to place restrictions on the use of their semen donation. There are, however, very different long-term implications of donation to a couple with no father figure, such as a single woman or a same-sex couple and our counsellor will discuss these aspects with you.

HAVING TREATMENT WITH DONOR SEMEN

Who would normally use donated semen?

The donor semen programme is available to all patients who have received medical advice that this will be the best approach for them. This may occur where the male partner has no sperm or may be done to avoid transmitting genetic disease. Single women and same sex couples are welcome to access treatment with donor semen at IVFAustralia, although it should be noted that there is, unfortunately, no Medicare rebate for fertility treatment unless there is a medical cause for the infertility. Donor semen can be used in conjunction with a donated egg.

We have no restrictions on overseas or interstate patients coming to IVFAustralia to receive treatment with donated semen. However we do insist, for your own wellbeing, that you have a consultation with an IVFAustralia specialist and have the appropriate level of counselling to ensure that your health and emotional needs are being properly met. The consultation with an IVFAustralia specialist can be an initial telephone consultation to plan treatment followed up by a face-to-face visit at the time of the treatment.

For health reasons, treatment with donor semen is **not** provided to women past the age of the natural menopause (51 completed years).

How can donor semen be used to achieve a pregnancy?

Donor semen can be used either by artificial insemination or by IVF. Artificial insemination involves having a sample of the semen placed into your uterus by one of our fertility nurses at the right time of the month. Sometimes, fertility drugs may be used to stimulate release of more than one egg.

IVF is a process where higher doses of fertility drugs are used to cause a larger (usually 5-15) number of eggs to grow. These eggs are then collected from your body and combined with the donated sperm in the laboratory before being replaced back into your body a few days later. IVF is normally a more intense (and thus more expensive) form of treatment but carries a significantly higher pregnancy rate than artificial insemination.

Your IVFAustralia specialist will advise you about the best method of treatment for you.

How do I start treatment?

Couples who need treatment with donated semen will normally need to undertake an initial consultation with an IVFAustralia Specialist. The specialist will discuss the process, assess the health of the couple and arrange any preliminary testing that is needed.

The couple (or single woman if applicable) will then need to meet with a counsellor and discuss the long term implications of treatment with donated semen.

After that, if donor insemination is the right method of treatment, the couple will either see a nurse to start treatment or join the waitlist if there are no donors currently available (see below).

How does the Waitlist work?

If there are no suitable de-identified donors currently available for a recipient, there may be an option to join the IVFAustralia waitlist. You will be required to sign the waitlist agreement and pay a non-refundable administration fee.

The waitlist agreement allows people to remain on the list for a maximum of three years. If you still wish to remain on the waitlist after that time, you are allowed to do so but you need to see your IVFAustralia specialist to review your case and discuss the likelihood of ever obtaining semen from IVFAustralia.

When you reach the top of the waitlist, you will be offered a Treatment Slot (see below) with a specified donor. If you are not happy with that donor, you can decline treatment with that donor or any others offered to you, without losing your place at the top of the waitlist.

What is a Treatment Slot?

Once you accept a treatment slot, you will be able to have up to THREE cycles of treatment (of any kind) using semen from that donor. If you do not have a baby within these three cycles, you would be required to rejoin the waitlist at the bottom if you wished to have further treatment.

Unfortunately, due to the shortage of de-identified semen donors, and individuals' preferences, a place on the waitlist does **NOT** guarantee that a recipient will receive treatment using donated sperm.

What does treatment with donor insemination cost?

There are two separate parts of the costs of treatment with donor insemination.

- The costs of the treatment itself (artificial insemination or IVF). Your specialist will be able to advise you further about this.
- A contribution to the expenses of assessing, testing and counselling the sperm donor. To comply with relevant Australian legislation that prohibits trading in human sperm, these expenses are calculated at cost recovery rates only.

THINKING IT OVER

Implications to consider for potential donors and recipients

When deciding to become a semen donor or recipient there are many psychological, legal and ethical factors to consider. Your IVFAustralia counsellor will help take you through many of these implications to assist you in coming to a fully informed decision. Many people will have already researched and discussed the implication of donating or utilising donor semen before beginning the formal process with IVFAustralia. Your counsellor is required by the current RTAC guidelines to demonstrate that potential donors and recipients have discussed and understood a range of topics relevant to the welfare of any potential child created from donation, the donor, the recipients and any children currently in the families involved.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Weblinks

IVFAustralia www.ivf.com.au

Donor Conception Support Group (Australia) www.dcsq.org.au

Donor Conception Network (United Kingdom) www.donor-conception-network.org There are a series of booklets titled 'Talking and Telling' available for free Download which consider many aspects of Disclosure

ACCESS Infertility Support www.access.org.au

Books

Bourne, Kate. (2002). ***Sometimes it takes three to make a Baby: Explaining Egg Donor Conception to Young Children.*** Melbourne: Melbourne IVF. ISBN: 0958190305. (Children's Book)

Daniels, Kenneth. (2004). ***Building a Family with the Assistance of Donor Insemination.*** Palmerston North: Dunmore Press. ISBN 0864694717

Lorbach, Caroline (2003). ***Experiences of Donor Conception: Parents, Offspring and Donors through the Years.*** London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. ISBN 184310122

Mattes, Jane. (1994). ***Single Mothers by Choice: A Guidebook for Single Women Who Are Considering or Have Chosen Motherhood*** USA: Three Rivers Press. ISBN: 0812922468

Mohler, Marie., & Frazer, Lacy. (2002). ***A Donor Insemination Guide: Written by and for Lesbian Women.*** New York: Haworth Press. ISBN 1560232277