

Information for potential sperm donors

General information about donating

Donated sperm is one of the most generous gifts a person can give. Many donors feel a strong sense of pride in knowing that they have brought happiness to people who could not otherwise have become parents. However, the decision to donate can have far-reaching consequences for you, the people who receive your donations, any children born as a result, and your current and future family members.

This aim of this information sheet is to:

- Help prepare you for donating
- Provide information about the law of donation and how it affects you
- Answer your questions about the process of donation
- Encourage you to think about the issues you may face

Who is eligible to be a donor?

To be a donor you need to be older than 18 and younger than 46. You need to be generally healthy and have no serious medical conditions. We accept both men who have had their own children and men who have not.

These are the most basic requirements. If you meet these then we would encourage you to complete our *Questionnaire for potential sperm donors* (available on our website), which we will then review. If the answers you provide indicate that you may be suitable to be a donor, we will invite you to visit the clinic for an initial appointment. At this appointment we will ask you to produce a semen sample for analysis. If your sample is suitable then we will talk you through the donation process in full. You can take as long as you need to decide if you wish to proceed.

Who needs donated sperm?

Donated sperm is needed by a broad group of patients. These range from heterosexual couples (where the male partner does not produce sperm, has very poor-quality sperm, or carries a genetic abnormality which could be transmitted to his children) to same-sex female couples and single women. Donated sperm is used to fertilise eggs, either using artificial insemination or IVF treatment; both of which take place within a fertility clinic.

What do I have to consider before donating my sperm?

Donation can have a far-reaching impact on the people who receive your donation, donor-conceived children, and you and your own family. In a legal and social sense, the people who receive your donation will be the parents of any child that is born. However, the child will inherit your genes and therefore they, and any children of theirs, will be genetically related to you. You should consider how you feel about this now and try to imagine how you may feel about it in the future.



As the law now stands, once a donor-conceived child reaches the age of 18, they are legally entitled to find out identifying information about their donor. This includes the donor's full name, date of birth, and last known address. Not all donor-conceived children will want to know this, but some will, and they may wish to contact you. You need to think about this carefully and discuss it with your partner (if you have one). We would also recommend that you consider telling your own parents and your wider family.

Payment

The idea of sperm donation is attractive to some men because they assume that they can be paid for donations. This is not the case in the UK - it is against the law for us to 'pay' sperm donors the way that they may be paid in other countries. However, we can offer you compensation for expenses you incur in visiting the clinic (at present this is a standard fee of £35 for each time you donate). This compensation is issued as a lump sum once you have completed the donation process.

What advice and support will I get?

The decision to donate sperm is an important one, with life-long implications. There are many issues to consider and some of them are complicated. Before coming to a final decision, you must have at least one session with our donation implications counsellor. The counsellor has a great deal of knowledge and expertise in dealing with both sperm donors and the recipients of donor sperm, and they may bring up issues that you had not considered. The counselling session(s) may be particularly helpful in exploring how the decision will affect you and your current or future partner, and any children you have now or may have in the future.

What tests have to be done before a donor is accepted?

We have a responsibility to our patients to ensure that we prevent them from becoming infected with any diseases that could be transmitted through the use of donor sperm. We also must take all reasonable steps to avoid treating them with sperm that could result in a serious genetic (inherited) condition being passed onto their child.

The standard screening for donors is as follows:

- Semen analysis (to make sure that your sperm is suitable for use in treatment and has a good chance of being able to contribute to a pregnancy)
- Blood tests for HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, syphilis, and HTLV
- Urine tests for chlamydia and gonorrhoea
- Karyotype (a basic genetic test which checks that the chromosomes in your cells are structurally normal)
- Other tests to determine whether you are a carrier of certain genetic diseases which are most common in people of your ethnic background

Occasionally, other screening tests will be performed, for example if you have lived in or travelled to certain foreign countries. All tests, and the implications of their results, will be fully discussed with you before they are undertaken.

What details will I have to give about myself and why?

The details you will be asked to provide include:

- Your full name
- The name you were born with (if different)
- Your date and place of birth
- Your NHS or passport number
- Your address at the time of donation
- Your GP's contact details
- Whether or not you have your own children, and if so, the number of children you have and their sex
- Your height and weight, and the colour of your eyes, hair and skin
- Your ethnic group and your biological mother and father's ethnic group
- Your medical history
- Your family medical history
- Your occupation
- Your skills and interests
- Your reasons for wishing to donate sperm

You will also be asked to write a short description of yourself and a 'goodwill message' which can be read by the patients who receive your donation and by their donor-conceived children in the future. People conceived as a result of sperm donation are often curious about their origins; they may want to know whether they look like you or have a similar personality. They may also wonder why you decided to donate and whether you have children of your own. You will be encouraged to include information about your background, education, achievements, views, values and life experiences; although none of this may be written in a way that could identify you.

All the details you give will be stored on a register held by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority. The information is coded and is not available to the general public. Only those who have a legal right to access it may do so.

Sperm donation and the law

Removal of anonymity

On the 1st of April 2005 a law came into effect with respect to sperm donation. Once donor-conceived people reach the age of 18 they are legally allowed to find out the identity of the sperm donor who donated to their parent(s). This 'removal of anonymity' law came about after studies carried out on adopted and donor-conceived children found that they benefitted emotionally from knowing who their biological parents were; regardless of whether they had any contact with them.

Whether you would be comfortable with a donor-conceived person knowing your identity (in the future) is the most important thing you must consider before deciding to donate.

You must also consider the advances in technology which mean that genetic relationships can be uncovered (accidentally or otherwise) via DNA sequencing and sharing websites such as 23andMe. Thinking ahead, a donor-conceived child is likely to have very easy access to services like this by the time they reach the age of 18. Bear in mind that even if you yourself do not submit your DNA to one of these services, any close biological relative of yours would still appear as 'linked' to such a donor-conceived child if both parties agreed to this level of information sharing.

How many children could be born from my donations?

Sperm from a single donor may be used to create a maximum of 10 families. There is no legal limit to the number of children that may be born within these 10 families, however people who need donor sperm and fertility treatment will rarely have more than two or three children. Some will have only one child.

Do I have any say about how my samples are used?

If you are only donating to someone you know then you can specify that you wish to donate to this recipient only. In this circumstance you would be acting as a 'known donor', and the recipient would be required to pay all costs associated with your recruitment and screening, and the storage of your samples.

It may be possible to place certain other restrictions on how your sperm is used, however none of these may be discriminatory based on age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex, or sexual orientation.

What if I change my mind after I have provided samples for donation?

By law, when you donate you must consent in writing to your sperm being used in treatment. You are entitled to withdraw your consent up until the point at which your sperm is used for insemination or IVF treatment, or any embryos created from your donated sperm are transferred into a recipient. However, given that fertility treatment is costly, time-consuming, and highly emotionally and physically stressful for patients, it is important to be sure beforehand that you really want to donate.

Do I have any responsibilities towards a child created from my sperm?

You will have no legal obligations towards any child created from your donation. The person who received your donation (and their partner if they have one) will be the child's legal and social parent(s). You will not be named on the birth certificate and will have no rights over how the child is brought up; nor could you ever be asked to contribute financially.

However, as you are genetically related to the child you may feel you have certain emotional and psychological responsibilities. Knowing about their genetic heritage helps people to make sense of

who they are. This is why you are asked to give information about your family and medical history and to write something about yourself that a donor-conceived person can read when they are older.

The only other responsibility that donors have is to be open and honest about their medical history and that of their family members. If it is found you purposefully withheld information about this, you could technically be sued by a donor-conceived person or their family. However, this isn't something you need to worry about as long as you are honest with us. We will get in touch with your GP practice to double check the details you give us.

What information can a donor-conceived child receive about their donor?

The parents of donor-conceived children can access the non-identifying information that you provide on your registration form at any time. Many of these parents will introduce the concept of donation to their child at a young age, so that the child will grow up with an understanding of the way in which they were conceived. The parents may or may not share what they know about you, and what type of person you are.

When a donor-conceived person reaches the age of 16 they can apply to the HFEA to gain access to this non-identifying information themselves. Only when a donor-conceived person reaches the age of 18 may they access the information that identifies you (your name, date of birth, and last known address).

If a donor-conceived person asks for this information about you, the HFEA will notify you that this information has been requested and provided. It is therefore important for you to keep your contact details up to date with us and the HFEA. The parents of donor-conceived children cannot access your identifying information directly at any time.

Can I get any information about any children created through my donation?

If you wish to know, and in order to prepare you for what may happen in the future, we can tell you how many children have been born as a result of your donation, the sex of these children, and the year in which they were born. We cannot tell you their names or any other identifiable information. You will never be able to receive identifiable information about the children born through your donations unless they choose to try and contact you once they become an adult.

The sperm donation process at the Fertility Centre

The following section gives you further information on the sperm donation process at The Fertility Centre.

Initial appointment

If the answers you provide on your questionnaire indicate that you may be suitable to be a donor, the Fertility Centre will invite you to attend an initial appointment (at your convenience). At this appointment we will give you an opportunity to ask any questions you have about the information contained in this document, or about any other aspects of donation.



We will then ask you to produce a semen sample by masturbation in a private room designed for this purpose. We will analyse your sample and discuss the results with you.

It is important to be aware that around half of the men who reach this stage will produce semen samples that are not suitable to be used in donation. This is not necessarily indicative of a fertility problem, as we typically recruit men whose sperm counts are higher than average (due to the degeneration that occurs during the freezing and thawing process).

If your results indicate that you may have a fertility problem, we will take time to explain this to you, and to give you advice on how to get help either now or in the future. We will also offer you a session with our counsellor.

Medical consultation

If the results of your semen analysis indicate that you are eligible to be a donor, you will have a medical consultation with one of our consultants. They will go through your medical history and ensure that you are fit and well. This will also involve a physical examination.

Counselling

Early in the donation process, and before you sign any consent forms, we will ask you to make an appointment with the Fertility Centre's counsellor. This session is entirely confidential, and the counsellor cannot tell us what you say. However, the counsellor can make a recommendation as to whether they think you are suitable to be a donor. The primary objective of this appointment, though, is to allow you to discuss the implications of donation with them, and to ask further questions. You are welcome to have additional counselling sessions if you wish.

Initial screening and consents

Once you have had your counselling session and medical consultation, you will attend the clinic to undergo blood and urine screening tests. You will also complete the consent forms necessary for sperm donation and produce your first donation sample.

Sperm banking appointments

We typically ask our sperm donors to attend the clinic once or twice a week for 5-10 weeks to produce semen samples for donation. We can be flexible with these appointments and can see you during evenings or weekends if you wish.

If it is impossible for you to attend this regularly or for this length of time, then we may be able to accept fewer donations from you. Whether this is feasible will be decided on a case-to-case basis. Please mention to us as soon as possible if you think you may struggle to donate between 10 and 15 times in total.

Final screening

Six months after your last donation date we will ask you to undergo one final round of blood and urine testing. This allows us to be sure that you have not contracted any infections during the donation period. Final screening is a legal requirement of the HFEA.

Where can I find out more information?

Human Fertilisation & Embryology Authority (HFEA) – the authority that regulates and monitors all licensed fertility treatments. www.hfea.gov.uk

Donor Conception Network - a national support group for people who have conceived through donation and those who are considering becoming a donor. www.dcnetwork.org