

Male Infertility



What is Infertility?

This is a term used to refer to women who are unable to get pregnant as well as men who are unable to impregnate a woman after a year of sexual intercourse without contraception.

Pregnancy requires:

1. A woman's ovaries able to release a viable egg.
2. The egg being able to travel down the fallopian tube.
3. A man being able to ejaculate.
4. His sperm being able to travel to the fallopian tubes.
5. The sperm and egg to unite and fertilize.
6. The fertilized egg being able to attach to the woman's uterus and to be nurtured there until the fetus is ready to be born.

A problem with any of the above steps would lead to infertility.

Causes of Male Infertility

Male fertility requires the production of mature sperm of adequate quantity and quality, as well as being able to sustain an erection and ejaculate. It also requires enough semen to carry the sperm to the egg that have the right shape and move the right way.

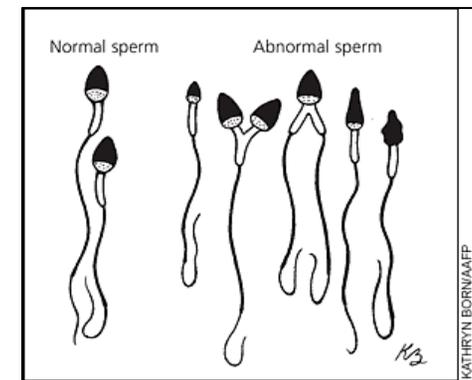
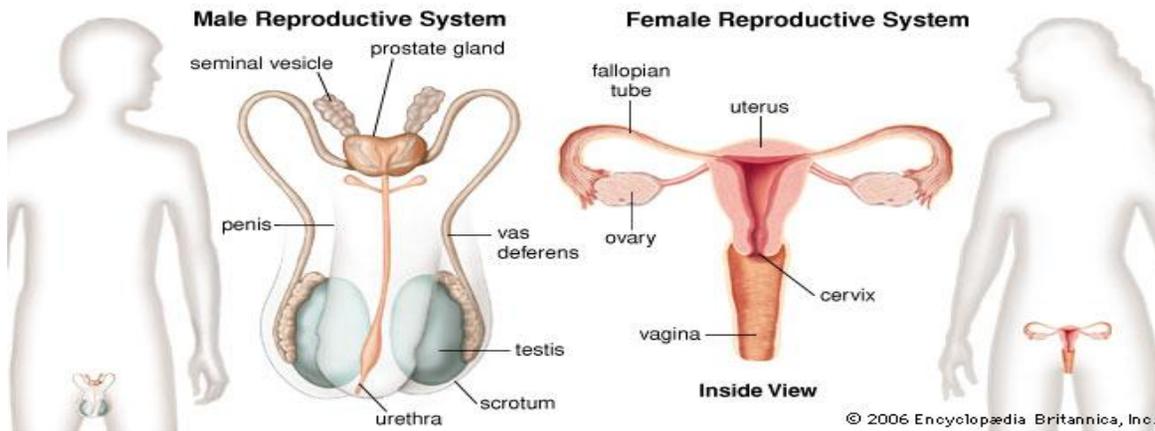


Fig 1: Types of Spermatozoa

Male infertility can be caused by physical problems e.g. testes that do not produce enough normal sperm, hormonal problems, lifestyle factors or environmental factors.

Specific contributors towards infertility include:

1. **Age**
2. **Stress**
3. Exposing the testes to **high temperatures**, which affects the ability of the sperm to move and fertilize the egg



Effects of high temperatures can be seen in the following:

- **Cryptorchism:** Is a condition where the testes do not descend into the scrotum. It does not affect the ability to have/ sustain an erection but means that the testes remain in the body which has a higher temperature than the scrotum.
 - **Tight underwear:** can also increase the temperature of the testes.
 - **Varicoceles:** found in 40% of infertile men are enlarged or dilated varicose veins around the testicles which can increase the temperature of the testes. They feel like 'a bag of worms'.
4. **Smoking**
 5. **Alcohol**
 6. **Illicit drugs**
 7. **Certain prescribed medications**
 8. **Environmental toxins**
 9. **Genetic conditions**, e.g. Klinefelter's syndrome
 10. **Chronic medical conditions**

Treating Male Infertility

It is important to see a urologist or reproductive health specialist if your primary care doctor has identified that you may have male infertility. Your primary care physician will take a detailed history of your past illnesses (e.g. mumps), current medical conditions and medications as well as identifying risky lifestyle choices that may be contributing towards infertility.

You will then have a general examination as well as an examination of your reproductive organs to identify any structural abnormalities.

After the above you, will have a **semen analysis** (examining semen for abnormalities within a few hours of an ejaculation), hormonal profiling or scans (if a structural problem is identified).

Treatment is aimed at getting good quality sperm to fertilize the egg and is different for every couple depending on what problem is identified.

Treatment may include:

- Treating Erectile Dysfunction
- Hormonal replacement
- Surgical correction of Varicoceles
- **Assisted Reproduction Techniques** for the retrieval of sperm e.g. Testicular and Epididymal Sperm Extraction (TESA, PESA). As well as for the fertilization of the egg, e.g. Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI).

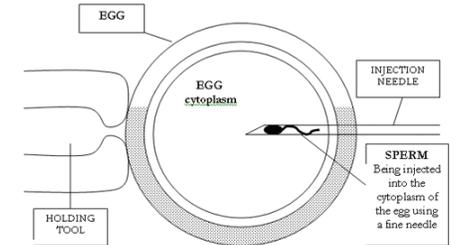
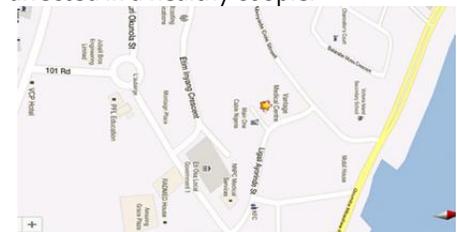


Fig 2: Intracytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI)

REMEMBER:

- **Infertility** is the lack of a successful pregnancy after a year of unprotected intercourse.
- **Fertility** is a process dependent on a multitude of factors, any of which may be affected in a healthy couple.



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