

Your IVF / ICSI / FET fertility journey

Patient information

As you begin your treatment journey, you will have many questions about the process and your understanding of what lies ahead.

This document is a guide to help answer those questions and help you understand the stages of your fertility journey. It will lay out each stage of the process explaining what happens and what is required.

Changes due to Covid-19:

- All patients and partners are required to have Covid tests twice during treatment – before starting medication and before the egg collection procedure. The RFC will book these appointments for you. These will be carried out at Knockbracken Healthcare Park only.
- Attendance at the RFC is by appointment only.
- You are required to wear a face covering.
- You will be asked to wait in your car or remain outside until contacted to enter.
- You will be asked questions about Covid symptoms and travel and will have your temperature taken on arrival. If you answer yes to any questions or if your temperature is raised, your appointment will be deferred.
- To limit footfall in the centre, **your partner will only be able to accompany you for the embryo transfer and pregnancy scan appointments.**
- Your partner will attend for appointments such as HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C screening blood test, Covid test, semen sample production on day of egg collection (if this applies).

Stage 1: Pre-offer

Your journey will start when you receive your '**Pre-offer letter**' from our admin team.

In preparation for your treatment, we require information that maybe applicable to your treatment such as any new medical conditions, commencement of new medications, fertility treatment undertaken at another clinic and what your current BMI status is etc.

The information required is important and in some cases it can take time as some may require GP appointments, a procedure (smear) or some blood tests and these all take time to get the results back.

The Pre-Offer letter is sent to you several months ahead of when you are expected to reach the top of the waiting list, so you can gather this information as it is essential

so that your treatment can progress smoothly when you receive your 'Treatment offer letter'.

It is advisable that you have your BMI accurately checked to be sure you meet the criteria of **30.0kg** or below before accepting any future treatment offer, as failure to meet the criteria will result in discharge from the service.

You are not required to send any of your blood or smear results into the clinic, but we do require that you forward by post, a summary of any fertility treatment you may have had at another clinic.

Stage 2: Treatment offer

Make sure to thoroughly read your offer letter as it details information on things we will require from you as you start your treatment journey, it will give you time to have these things prepared in advance.

Once you have accepted your offer and we have checked you are ok to proceed, we will send you a link to your e-mail account to register on **the portal messaging system**. This will only be for you, not your partner.

This is a new faster and safer communication system, it is important that you safely store/record your log in details for this along with your registration details for the 'Fertility Consenting Platform', which the clinic will provide for you in stage 3.

Please remember that these are two separate systems, one is for communicating with the unit teams and the other is solely for completing your treatment consents and forms.

Photographic ID

You and your partner are required to provide valid (in date) photographic ID:

- Passport
- Driving licence photo card
- Electoral identity card

Stage 3: Consenting

This stage is the start of you consenting to your fertility treatment.

There are two parts to this stage:

1. Pre-consultation forms
2. Pre-treatment consents



The first stage is completed by administration and the second stage by the nursing team.

Remember that these are completed on the **Fertility Consenting Platform** so you will need your 'keyphrase' that will be sent to you by text message.

Stage 3: Scheduling your treatment

You will have provided your dates for your current and last period along with your cycle length when completing your consents.

Your chart will now have passed to the nursing team for your treatment to be scheduled.

Your schedule acts as a guideline for your treatment cycle, however, patient's individual circumstances vary and changes to dosages, scan dates and procedure dates may be made during the course of your treatment.

Your schedule is visible via your portal calendar, your treatment commencement date, scan appointments, Covid tests and daily medication doses.

You click on the calendar and the little coloured box on each day; this will open the window detailing your medication and dose, plus a link to the instructional video on how to take your medication.

Therefore, you will only receive the first stage of your schedule up until the date of your first scan.

You will be provided with a provisional date for your egg collection at this stage.

During treatment, it is important that you check your portal at least once a day for messages re your treatment from the unit. After your scan, your chart will go to the unit's patient planning meeting to assess your treatment at this stage to see if any adjustments are required. You will then receive a portal message from the nursing team updating you re your treatment and releasing more scheduled treatment to your next scan.

When planning a pregnancy it is wise to make certain lifestyle adjustments. If appropriate, you should stop smoking, reduce alcohol intake and commence a daily folic acid tablet (400mcg) and 5mg folic acid if indicated. You both should also be eating a balanced healthy diet.

Many couples undergoing fertility treatment have a small chance of achieving a pregnancy themselves, for example those with unexplained infertility. Therefore, all couples should use condoms, during intercourse, from the end of the menstrual period prior to starting medication.

HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C screening (IVF / ICSI only)

The [Human Fertilization and Embryology Authority \(HFEA\)](#) requires all individuals who will be placing gametes (for example semen samples, testicular samples) and embryos in storage be screened for hepatitis B surface and core, hepatitis C and HIV.

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus. This virus is transmitted through blood and semen contact. It impairs the immune system and can develop into a serious condition (AIDS) if not treated. However, there are effective therapies now available for HIV infection.

Hepatitis B and C are viruses that cause an infection of the liver. Both infections are capable of causing chronic (over many years) infection. If this happens then the liver may become damaged if left untreated. However, there are effective therapies now available for both hepatitis B and C infection.

The risk of transmission of HIV and hepatitis B and C may be increased in the following ways:

1. Having unprotected sex with a man or woman who is infected with one of these viruses.
2. Injecting narcotic drugs into yourself and sharing needles with other drug users.
3. Having received blood or blood products before blood screening was introduced for HBV (***) HIV (1985) HCV (1991).

If you think you may be at increased risk of testing positive, you may speak in confidence to a doctor, nurse or counsellor at the clinic.

All patients attending the Regional Fertility Centre with the intention of having treatment, which involves the following, **MUST** be screened in advance:

- IVF
- ICSI
- Long-term storage of sperm or eggs
- Testicular biopsy

Donors will continue to be screened for HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, CMV, syphilis (VDRL, TPHA), and chromosome analysis, cystic fibrosis, blood group and where appropriate, Tay-Sachs, thalassemia and sickle cell anaemia.

Before treatment can commence, you will be required to have blood samples taken to screen for these viruses. Screening must be within three months of any initial treatment and within two years for any subsequent treatment. **You will be given an**

appointment to attend the RFC for this. You may have to attend for a second test – you will be informed by telephone if this is necessary.

Unfortunately, the RFC does not have the facilities to provide treatment for any patient found to be positive for HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C. In cases where a positive test is identified, the individual / couple will be informed and options for the treatment and storage in other units in the UK will be explored.

Starting medication

(Please note it is your responsibility to correctly store your medications after you have received them from Pharmacy, as failure to do so may result in you having to pay to replace them).

Down regulation phase

1. Either a nasal spray, tablets or injection will deliver the medication. This depends on your treatment type and medical requirement.
2. Your next period should come as expected, although sometimes it can be delayed by a few days due to the medication. If it does not, contact the RFC on the date indicated on schedule, as we will need to do a blood test and scan.
3. Some people experience side effects while on the spray (for example hot flushes or mood swings) but these will dissipate when injections are commenced.
4. Spray is continued throughout your treatment as per your schedule.

Patients on the oral contraceptive pill should experience a bleed when the contraceptive pill stops. This is often light.

Follicle stimulation phase

1. Follow your schedule, which is in your portal calendar.
2. Remember to view your instructional videos provided in your daily portal calendar.
3. If you have problems viewing the videos, [they are available to view on the RFC website](#) – scroll down to '**Demonstration videos for medication**'.
4. Check in your portal at least once a day to check for messages from the clinic re your treatment.

Scans

First scan

1. This is to check response to medication.
2. All scans are performed transvaginal (internal scan).
3. Please ensure you have emptied your bladder prior to the appointment.
4. Do not take your injection for that day until after scan (Bemfola only).
5. Sometimes a blood test maybe required.
6. You will be contacted via a portal message that afternoon to update your schedule and provide you with the status of your treatment at this time.

Final scan

1. This is to check if your follicles are of a mature enough size to proceed to your egg collection.
2. Final dates and dosage for FSH injection and Synarel will be confirmed to you via the portal messaging from the nursing team, along with the dose, date and time of Ovitrelle (your trigger injection).
3. Ovitrelle is a drug that triggers ovulation (egg release) and is taken 36 hours before egg collection.
4. Date and time of egg collection confirmed.

Egg collection

Arrive 20 minutes prior to procedure and remain in your car until the unit receptionist phones you. You will need to bring a dressing gown and slippers with you.

It is important that you are fasting from midnight but you are allowed a small glass of clear fluids up until 6am.

The anaesthetist will introduce himself or herself to you prior to the procedure.

You will be checked in by the nurse in recovery and have a venflon inserted by the anaesthetist in your arm prior to you being escorted into the OR room.

The procedure will take approximately 20 minutes and you will transfer back into recovery where you will remain for 45 to 60 minutes afterwards to recover from your procedure and anaesthetic.

Do not wear any perfume.

You should have an empty bladder for this procedure.

You cannot drive for 24 hours after the procedure due to your anaesthetic.

It is advisable to take the following day off work.



Your husband / partner will remain in the car until he is phoned to attend embryology to produce his semen sample in the clinic, unless frozen or donor sperm is being used. If he feels this may not be possible, please inform the nursing team via your portal messaging so that alternative arrangements are arranged.

In order to obtain the best semen quality, it is important to abstain from ejaculation for at least three days but not more than seven days prior to egg collection.

Recovery

You are monitored in the recovery area for approximately one hour before discharged home. You should expect to feel some 'period like' cramps and possibly some bleeding during this time.

The nurse will confirm with you your egg numbers and provide you with details of your named embryologist to contact the next morning to check on fertilisation rate and to arrange the date for embryo transfer.

You will be advised, if appropriate, to commence Crinone gel that evening, and continue to take one in the morning and one in the evening as per your schedule until your pregnancy test. This is progesterone, which helps maintain the lining of the womb to give the embryo the best opportunity to implant.

Before going home, you are given written information on post egg collection, which includes advice on the symptoms of ovarian hyperstimulation, a complication of fertility treatment.

Embryo transfer

This procedure is similar to having a cervical smear test. It may be a bit uncomfortable but usually only takes a few minutes and you can go home immediately afterwards.

The embryos are placed in the womb using a very fine tube called a catheter. Your husband or partner may be present.

The embryologist will discuss with you the quality of your embryos, how many are recommended to be transferred and if any embryos are suitable for storage.

After embryo transfer

During this time, you can resume normal activities but avoid alcohol, drugs, and excessive exercise.

Some degree of discomfort in the lower abdomen can be expected over the next few weeks. However, if it is severe, or if you have any concerns, it is important that you contact the RFC or out-of-hours GP.



The nurse will confirm with you when to do your pregnancy test and provide you with a letter to take to your GP for more medication if required.

You will be given an outcome form to take home and complete when you have carried out your test.

Pregnancy test

You should return the outcome form indicating 'pregnant' or 'not pregnant', so administration can book your next appointment.

If your test is positive, a scan will be arranged three to four weeks later. This is when the pregnancy will be confirmed. You may experience some light bleeding and mild cramps during these weeks. If concerned contact the RFC.

If your test is negative, your period will normally come seven to ten days later. You will then be sent a review appointment to discuss future treatment options.