

Egg freezing and storage for fertility preservation

Information for trans and non-binary people

This leaflet gives you more information about options for preserving (saving/or protecting) your fertility. You may be considering starting treatments as part of your gender affirming care that may affect your fertility. You may not have thought about whether you want to have children in the future but it is important to think about things now so you can make the right decision for you.

Why might I need to preserve my fertility?

Some of the medications that you may be considering for your gender care could affect your fertility. The best time to store eggs would be before starting any gender affirming treatment but it should be possible to do this after you have started treatment.

GnRH Agonists (blocker injections) are very effective at blocking/stopping the production of oestrogen by stopping the release of some hormones from your brain. Blocking these hormones is likely to stop the growth and release of eggs in the ovaries and stop periods. This effect is likely to be reversible (when stopping blockers) but there is a small chance it could be irreversible (growth and release of eggs does not recover). Your ovaries will likely start to grow and release eggs (with return/or start of periods) quite soon after stopping blockers. If blockers were started before puberty, it may take a long time off blockers for your ovaries to start working and your body would go through puberty.

Testosterone (male hormone replacement) is likely to stop the growth and release of eggs as well as stop periods. We don't fully understand the long-term impact of testosterone on your ovaries and eggs, but we think that the effects are likely to be fully reversible.

How can I preserve my fertility?

To freeze eggs you need to follow a treatment programme that may take 2-3 weeks. You will need to take injections to stimulate follicles (fluid filled areas on your ovaries that contain eggs) to grow. Your response to these injections is monitored by performing ultrasound scans. These can either be done by scanning your tummy or putting the scan probe (wand) inside the vagina. When the follicles are big enough you need to have a small operation to collect the eggs. This is done with you asleep (sedated), so you won't remember anything about it. A needle is passed through the vagina and into the ovary to collect the eggs. You need to stay in hospital for about 2 hours after the procedure to make sure you are feeling okay. It is normal to have some pain in your tummy and to have some bleeding from the vagina. You will be told how many eggs were frozen on the same day as your egg collection.

If you are taking blockers, you may need to stop these prior to starting your treatment. If you are taking testosterone, you may be able to continue this or you may be asked to stop or reduce this. Your fertility doctor would talk to you about your options.

Who is eligible for egg storage?

You need to be referred by your endocrine (hormone) doctor with the support of the gender identity clinic. As part of this referral they will have assessed your eligibility for NHS funded storage of your eggs. If you do not meet the eligibility criteria you can pay to store your eggs.

What to expect at your clinic visit

You will be offered an appointment to see a fertility doctor to talk about your treatment in more detail. You will usually be offered an ultrasound scan to look at your ovaries as well as a blood test to assess your egg reserve. If you want to go ahead with treatment you will be added to a waiting list which can be up to 1 year. You can take time to decide and have a follow up appointment. There is no minimum age to store your eggs, but you need to understand what treatment involves and be able to give written consent.

How long can eggs be stored?

You can store your eggs for up to 55 years, but you must confirm consent every 10 years. So it is important that you let us know if your contact details change (address and telephone number).

Using your eggs in the future?

You may wish to use your eggs for treatment in the future. At this time, your GP would refer you to the fertility clinic. There are different criteria (rules) for using your eggs for treatment and these could change over time.

Do I need to store my eggs now?

There is no urgency to store your eggs now. Because we think the effect of testosterone and blockers on your ovaries is reversible you can decide to freeze your eggs in the future.

What other options do I have?

You may decide not to store your eggs. If you decide you want children in the future you may choose to try and fall pregnant naturally. Or if you do not wish to be pregnant you may be able to use eggs donated from another person or from a partner. You could also consider adopting or fostering a child. Or you may decide you do not want to have children at all.

Counselling

You will have opportunity to meet one of our fertility counsellors. The counsellor will talk to you about your options and explore your thoughts and feelings around freezing your eggs. Please be assured that counselling is not part of an assessment process and does not affect your treatment. You can have further appointments if you would like more support before, during or after your treatment.

Confidentiality

Appointments are confidential meaning anything you have discussed or are worried about will be private; staff will not share this with anyone (including your parents) unless you give permission. You may be feeling quite overwhelmed now and may find it helpful to talk things over with a family member or a close friend.