



A simple guide to ICSI

If you've been told you may need ICSI, it will help to learn as much as you can about what is involved in the process. This will enable you to feel more confident and more in control as you go through treatment.

What is ICSI?

Intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection, or ICSI, is a form of IVF treatment that was developed to help overcome male fertility problems. During an ICSI cycle, a single sperm is injected right into the egg by the embryologist working in the laboratory.

Who needs ICSI?

Generally ICSI is used when the male partner has fertility problems, but it may also be suggested if previous IVF treatment has not been successful due to problems with fertilisation of the eggs. Sometimes a decision will be made as to whether to opt for IVF or ICSI on the day dependent on the quality of the semen sample, but your clinic will always discuss this with you.

You should not usually be offered ICSI if it is your first treatment cycle and there are no problems with the sperm. Sometimes people assume that ICSI is more likely to be successful than IVF and will ask for it at the clinic. It is important to be aware that ICSI is only a good treatment when IVF is not likely to be successful. Research shows that ICSI will not increase your chances of getting pregnant if you do not need it.

How is an ICSI cycle different?

From the patient perspective, an ICSI cycle will not seem any different from a normal IVF cycle as all of the stages of treatment

will be the same. The differences will occur in the laboratory once the eggs have been collected.

The embryologist will prepare the semen sample carefully to make sure the best quality sperm are used. The ICSI procedure is carried out using a special microscope with two arms on either side. One healthy-looking sperm is identified from the sample, and is sucked up into a pipette. The sperm will be injected right into the egg through a hollow needle. The eggs are then kept in an incubator and if they are successfully fertilised, one or two can be transferred to the womb.

Cost of treatment

ICSI is more expensive than standard IVF. Embryologists have to have specialist training to learn how to carry out this delicate procedure and it involves more time in the laboratory.

Is ICSI safe?

People are often concerned about the safety of ICSI as there have been a number of scare stories concerning the technique in recent years.

ICSI was only developed in the early 1990s and is a relatively new treatment. There have been suggestions that ICSI could allow fertility problems to be passed on from father to any son born using the treatment. There have also been concerns that ICSI may be linked to an increased risk of birth defects, although any increase may be related to the underlying fertility problem rather than ICSI itself.

It is important to keep this in perspective, but it is worth discussing any worries you have with your fertility specialist before coming to a decision about opting for ICSI.

If you want to know more about ICSI, you may want to read 'The Complete Guide to IVF' - see the books page (<http://fertilitymatters.org.uk/books/>).