

INTRA-UTERINE INSEMINATION

Intra-uterine Insemination (IUI) is the technique of placing sperm directly into the uterus. IUI may be used in cases where women do not release an egg regularly. IUI may also be used for male erection and ejaculation problems. IUI is also effective where donor sperm is being used.

Semen consists of two elements - the sperm cells themselves and the liquid (seminal plasma) which makes up most of the ejaculate volume. Seminal plasma is very irritating to the uterus and must be "washed" or removed before IUI. Washing is followed by an incubation step after which the motile sperm are carefully removed and used for the insemination.

The sperm are placed into the uterus with a thin plastic tube which is passed through the cervix. The procedure is usually painless and requires only a few minutes, after which we suggest that you stay lying down for 10 to 15 minutes. About 10% of women will experience temporary menstrual-like cramping and occasionally a spot of bleeding. Taking simple painkillers such as paracetamol is usually sufficient if you do feel uncomfortable. IUI is usually repeated for up to 3 cycles, after which the treatment strategy is re-evaluated. The cycles do not have to be consecutive to be effective.

Risks of IUI

Sperm washing removes most of the bacteria from the ejaculate, but neither the sperm nor the cervix can truly be sterilised. There is always the slight chance that IUI could produce an infection in the uterus, called endometritis. Experience has shown this to be an uncommon occurrence with a risk less than 1%. Symptoms of an infection include lower abdominal pain, fever, vaginal discharge, or continued vaginal bleeding or spotting. Mild cases can be treated with oral antibiotics but moderate or severe infections require hospitalisation for treatment with intravenous antibiotics. Occasionally, even after washing, the sperm may irritate the pelvis and mimic an infection. This may cause discomfort and bloating, but there will be no fever and no elevation of the white blood count.

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Ovarian Stimulation and IUI

"Fertility drugs" can be used to induce the ovaries to produce more than one egg each cycle to maximise the chance of pregnancy. Alternate day gonadotrophin injections (Menopur) are usually used. In addition, an HCG injection (Pregnyl) is given to trigger maturation and release of the eggs.

Vaginal ultrasound identifies the number and maturity of ovarian follicles, which may contain eggs. Once the leading follicle is 18-20mm in diameter and the lining of the womb (endometrium) is suitably thickened, the final HCG injection (Pregnyl) is given. Insemination is performed approximately 40 hours later. It is advisable to keep your bladder FULL at the time of insemination as this makes the procedure easier. If, however, your womb is tilted backwards, you may be advised to have an empty bladder.

Risks of Ovarian Stimulation and IUI

Some patients do not respond to the drugs and their cycle has to be cancelled and re-started using a higher dose of drugs. Some patients over respond to the drugs and are at risk of unacceptably high order multiple pregnancies e.g. triplets and above. In this case, the cycle has to be cancelled and the couple are advised to avoid unprotected sex. With any treatment that does go ahead, there is a 15-20% chance of multiple pregnancy.

How to have IUI Treatment at Kingston Hospital

Once you have decided to consider IUI treatment, you should telephone or email the Assisted Conception Unit on 020 8934 3155 or or khn-tr.kingstonacu@nhs.net to make an appointment. You will be seen by the doctors and nurses within the unit to discuss this treatment and you will have plenty of time to ask any questions. Your initial consultation will usually be with the doctor who will ensure that all the investigations are up to date and that you are fully informed as to what is likely to happen. After this, you will be seen by the nurse to plan the treatment, sort out the paperwork and answer any further questions you may have.

Generally, the injections begin on day three of your menstrual cycle with insemination around mid-cycle. You will usually require four injections, which are self-administered, and two scans prior to the insemination.

We try our best to commence treatment at times convenient to you. However you should be aware that because the timing of IUI can be unpredictable we have to be very careful to avoid bank holidays and some staff annual leave and this can mean delaying the treatment cycle at some times of the year.

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Regulatory Requirements

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) regulate IUI treatment. As such, there are certain conditions, which need to be fulfilled prior to any treatment taking place. These are listed below:

1. Both you and your partner will need to have a blood test to check for HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis B Core or Hepatitis C. These tests must be less than one year old at the time of treatment.
2. We need to take positive steps to confirm your identity. To that end, we will need to see photographic identity in the form of a driving licence or passport for both of you. We will also record your picture to keep on file.
3. We will ask you to complete a “Consent to Disclose” form, which informs us who we are allowed to communicate with regarding your treatment. This is not mandatory but we consider this to be good practice.

Cost of Treatment

The NHS does not usually fund IUI treatment and you will need to pay for any treatment that you receive. The costs of treatment will be fully explained to you at the time of your consultation. You should also receive our pricing schedule and information for private patients.

Suggestions and Complaints

We are always keen to improve our service and welcome comments, good and bad. If you are unhappy with the service we provide then please let us know. If you wish to make a complaint, this should be in writing to Nick Pulsford, ACU Manager. He can be contacted on 020 8934 3155 or by email to nick.pulsford@nhs.net

Emergency Contacts

The ACU is staffed Monday to Friday 8.30am to 5.00pm. If you need to contact us urgently during these hours please use the general department number 020 8934 3155. If the phone is not answered you should leave a message and someone will get back to you. If you have an out of hours emergency then telephone the number above and you will be directed to an emergency mobile number which should be used for **emergencies only**.

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