

Fertility Advice and Treatment for Patients

Who is this leaflet for?

For the vast majority of women, getting pregnant is straightforward, but some can have difficulties. If you want to have a baby and are registered with a GP in Camden, this leaflet gives you details of the services available.

Who can get fertility treatment?

Camden Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) attempts to support all individuals and couples who want to have a baby, but it does have a duty to achieve financial balance and so must make judgements about the affordability of services for local patients.

In light of this, Camden CCG sets out how fertility treatment will be funded in its fertility policy. The policy has been developed with local GPs and lead clinicians from fertility units in local hospitals, and also in considering and adopting where feasible guidance issued by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

You can read the CCG's fertility policy at www.camdenccg.nhs.uk

NICE guidance on fertility is available at www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg156

Treatment

There are three stages to getting NHS treatment. The first stage will be to visit your GP.

Stage 1: Visiting your GP practice

You (and your partner) should discuss the options with your GP if you are not pregnant after having one year of unprotected sex two to three times a week. If you are aged 36 or older, or have a known cause for infertility you should visit your GP after six months of trying. A healthcare professional at your GP practice will also be able to give you advice on how to stay healthy and improve your chances of getting pregnant. This may include advice on alcohol, smoking and getting to a healthy weight.

Your GP will ask a number of questions about your medical history and arrange some investigations if appropriate. If you are female, you could have:

- Blood test to check your immunity to rubella (German Measles).
- Blood test to see if you are a carrier of sickle cell disease or thalassemia (an inherited blood disorder, more common in people originating from certain countries).
- Test for chlamydia (an infection that can damage your fallopian tubes), usually by a self-taken vaginal swab or urine test .
- Blood tests to check your hormone levels, usually taken at the beginning of your cycle on day two to seven (your doctor will give you instructions when to have the test).
- Offer of HIV / hepatitis screening tests.

If you are male, you could have:

- Semen test.
- Offer of HIV / hepatitis screening tests.

Your GP will explain the results of the tests and discuss whether you and your partner might benefit from further tests at a hospital or treatment to help you become pregnant.

Stage 2: Referral to a fertility clinic

Your GP can refer you to a fertility clinic. Camden patients are usually seen at University College London Hospital (UCLH), St Mary's Hospital or the Whittington Hospital. Waiting times for clinics can vary but you should be seen within standard NHS waiting times. When you are seen at a fertility clinic, you may:

- Have tests repeated.
- Be offered a procedure to check your fallopian tubes – either an x-ray or an operation called a laparoscopy which also allows the doctor to check your pelvic area.

There are a range of fertility treatments available, which include:

- Drugs to stimulate the production of eggs.
- Surgery to treat underlying causes of infertility in women.
- Male patients with subnormal sperm tests may be referred to an andrologist to discuss the options available.

Stage 3: Referral to assisted conception unit

You may need to be referred by the fertility clinic to a specialist centre for assisted conception treatment (e.g. IVF and ICSI, described below).

Camden patients are usually referred to the Centre for Reproductive and Genetic Health (CRGH) or the Hammersmith Hospital. Your GP cannot refer you directly to the assisted conception unit – the fertility clinic must do this.

To be eligible for assisted conception treatment, you must:

- Be registered with a Camden GP practice.
- Be under 42 years (treatment cycles must start before your 42nd birthday).
- Not have conceived after two years' unprotected sex (one year for women aged 36 and over).
- Have a body mass index (BMI) between 19 and 30 at the time of treatment if you are female.
- Both you and your partner be non-smokers.
- Have no children from your current relationship or have no child if you are a single applicant. You can receive treatment if one partner has a child from a previous relationship, but the other does not. Foster children are not included in these restrictions.
- Have not had three or more previous 'fresh' IVF cycles, whether these have been funded privately or by the NHS. If you are aged 40 to 41, you cannot have had any previous IVF cycles.

What is a full cycle of treatment?

A 'fresh' treatment cycle starts with ovulation stimulation and ends with the implantation of a fresh embryo/blastocyst. If there are enough good quality embryos, others can be frozen and implanted later.

IVF (in vitro fertilisation) treatment involves the fertilisation of an egg (or eggs) outside of the body. The treatment can be performed using your own eggs and sperm, or using either donated sperm or donated eggs, or both.

Intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI) differs from conventional IVF in that the embryologist selects a single sperm to be injected directly into an egg, instead of fertilisation taking place in a dish where many sperm are placed near an egg.

Some men may need surgical sperm retrieval.

How many treatment cycles will I have?

For women aged under forty, Camden CCG will fund up to three full stimulation cycles, with or without ICSI, and up to three frozen cycles. Women aged 40 to 41 will be offered a maximum of one fresh embryo transfer and one frozen embryo transfer. The medication is included in the funding and this will be provided by the unit. Your GP cannot prescribe any fertility medication.

Treatment that is not funded

- Intrauterine insemination is not routinely funded but it can be offered as an alternative to vaginal sexual intercourse in certain groups.
- Use of donated eggs is not funded.
- The purchase of donor sperm is not funded.
- If you or your partner have been sterilised, fertility treatment will not be funded but your GP will still be able to offer you support and advice.
- IVF using a surrogate mother is not funded.

Patients with cancer

If you have an illness or are starting a treatment that may impact on your future fertility, funding will be provided for collection and storage of eggs, embryos and sperm. Your specialist should refer you to the fertility clinic to arrange this.

Patients with hepatitis B, C or HIV

If you or your partner have a long-term viral infection (hepatitis B, hepatitis C, or HIV), it is important to talk to your GP about the possible implications of your condition for your future children. Your GP can refer you to a specialist to help reproduction as safely as possible. Sperm washing will be funded for IUI / IVF / ICSI for couples where the male partner is HIV positive and the female partner is HIV negative, to prevent the transmission of HIV to an unborn child. Patients are usually referred to the Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.

Same-sex couples

If you are in a female same-sex relationship, or are single and have not become pregnant after six attempts at insemination in a clinical setting, your GP can refer you for further assessment, and advice about treatment options, but Camden CCG will not fund the purchase of donor sperm and will not fund associated IUI / IVF / ICSI treatments for those patients using donated sperm.

If you are in a male same-sex relationship, or are single, you can be referred for investigation if no pregnancy has occurred after six attempts at insemination for which your sperm has been donated.

What if you do not meet the eligibility criteria?

If you do not meet criteria set out in the fertility policy, and if your GP or clinician thinks there are exceptional clinical reasons for providing you with NHS-funded care, your GP or clinician may be able to request funding through the Individual Funding Request process. The process and policy for funding requests is available on our website at www.camdenccg.nhs.uk.

Private treatment

If you decide to pay for private treatment (i.e. outside the NHS), your GP cannot write an NHS prescription for any drugs or appliances that are recommended by that private treatment.

Other information

The Human Fertility and Embryology Authority (HFEA) regulate IVF / ICSI clinics and their website contains useful information for patients. You can visit their website at www.hfea.gov.uk.