

What happens to my unused eggs, sperm and embryos?

As a clinic we strive to give you the highest standard of care possible. In order for us to achieve this, we use surplus, donated eggs, sperm and embryos that are not suitable for treatment in the following ways:

1. To train new members of our laboratory team
2. To continuously update the skills of our experienced laboratory team members

The performance of this training not only allows us to maintain high success rates, it also allows us to continuously improve the services that we offer. During your treatment at the Hewitt Fertility Centre you may be required to complete a number of consent forms issued by our governing body, the HFEA. These consent forms will ask you whether you are willing for your surplus eggs, sperm, and embryos to be used for training purposes. The aim of this leaflet is to explain what this process involves so you can make an informed decision as to whether you are happy to be involved in our training programme.

Eggs remaining after your fertility treatment

Not every egg is able to create an embryo. For example, immature eggs cannot undergo fertilisation and some mature eggs are unable to complete the fertilisation process or may exhibit abnormal fertilisation. In all these situations, the eggs are unable to create an embryo and therefore cannot be used in your treatment. These are known as non-viable eggs, and we only ever use non-viable eggs for training purposes. Viable eggs, that have the potential to create a pregnancy, are always used as part of your treatment and are never used for training. Training eggs are typically used by trainee embryologists as they learn how to master technically complex laboratory procedures. It is important to note that your training eggs will never be mixed with sperm during the training period.

Sperm remaining after your fertility treatment

During IVF treatment, eggs are mixed with approximately 100,000 sperm whereas during ICSI treatment, each mature egg is injected with one sperm. It is therefore relatively common for 'surplus' sperm to remain following the performance of the IVF or ICSI procedure. Surplus sperm samples can be used for training purposes. Our embryologists typically use training sperm to develop and refine their sperm handling skills. Your sperm will never be used in training until after your IVF and ICSI treatment has been performed. Your surplus sperm will never be mixed with eggs during the training period.

Embryos that cannot be used for your fertility treatment

We carefully analyse all the embryos that are created within the laboratory. Any good quality embryos that are created as part of your treatment will either be transferred to your womb in a fresh treatment cycle, or frozen for your use in a future frozen embryo transfer. Any poor-quality embryos would normally be discarded as they would be unable to create a pregnancy. However, these non-viable embryos can be used for training as they provide our embryologists with the opportunity to develop the intricate laboratory skills needed to culture embryos in a safe and efficient manner.

Document Code: P-INFO-GEN-54	Version No: 8	Document Title: What happens to my unused eggs, sperm and embryos?	
Date of issue: 02.08.2023	Date of review: 02.08.2025	Owner: R Gregoire	Author: R Howard

What happens to my surplus frozen eggs, sperm and embryos?

If you have come to the end of your fertility journey and have surplus frozen eggs, sperm or embryos which you wish to remove from storage, you will be given four options at this time on what you would like to happen to them.

1. Donate to research
2. Donate to training at the Hewitt Fertility Centre
3. Donate to another patient
4. Discard your egg(s)/sperm/embryo(s)

If you have frozen samples in storage and have come to the end of your storage period, you will be required to fill in new consent forms which give you the option to:

1. Renew your consent to storage for your own treatment up to a further 10 years
2. Withdraw your consent to the storage of your samples, with option to:
 - a. Completely withdraw your consent to storage and dispose of your samples
 - b. Withdraw your consent to storage for treatment and donate your samples for training, which can remain frozen for up to a total of 55 years from the freeze date.

Please note, during your fresh cycle, training samples will never be cultured in the laboratory for longer than 7 days and all samples will be safely discarded at the end of the training period. The laboratory team would be extremely grateful if you could consider whether you would be happy to be involved in our training programme. You will have the opportunity to specify on your consent forms which samples can be used for training purposes. For example, you may be happy for your non-viable eggs to be used in training but not your surplus embryos. You will not be informed of how your eggs/sperm/embryos have been used in training, but we are happy to answer your questions if you are interested.

You can change or vary your consent at any time prior to your sperm, eggs or embryos being used in training. Please be reassured that the decision you make regarding the use of your sperm, eggs or embryos in training will not affect your treatment in any way. Gametes and embryos utilised in training are not anonymised and therefore if you have any questions regarding the use of your eggs, embryos, or sperm in training, please feel free to ask a member of the embryology team and we would be happy to discuss the process further with you. Please note that if we have accepted your egg(s), sperm, or embryo(s) for training and we no longer require them, or they are not suitable for training, we may opt to dispose of them prior to the end of the storage consent period. Please note it is unlikely that training will reveal any information relevant to your health or welfare. If relevant information does become available and you would like to be informed, please make our staff aware when completing consents. If you have any questions about this, please contact us.

This leaflet can be made available in different formats on request. If you would like to make any suggestions or comments about the content of this leaflet, then please contact the Patient Experience Team on 0151 702 4353 or by email at pals@lwh.nhs.uk

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