

**NHS Forth Valley**

# **Subfertility Service**

**Patient Information**

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of two overlapping, stylized blue waves. The waves are light blue and have a soft, rounded appearance, creating a sense of movement and flow.

Subfertility is a common problem affecting one in seven couples in the UK. The purpose of the Subfertility Clinic is to assess the problem, investigate the possible causes and provide the appropriate treatment where possible.

The clinic is staffed by Consultant Gynaecologists and Nurse Specialists. We are aware that the problem of subfertility can cause considerable anxiety and distress and we hope to provide you with helpful advice and support, as well as information.

This booklet aims to prepare you for your first visit to the clinic by explaining what the initial assessment involves and what tests may be carried out.

We advise you to attend as a couple at the first appointment since the assessment of subfertility involves both partners. However, if you are unable to attend as a couple (perhaps due to work or social commitments) it is acceptable for the female partner to attend alone. Please be aware we will be unable to discuss results of the male partner (if applicable).

It is helpful if you can make a note of the date your last period started. If your period starts on or close to your appointment, you should still attend as menstruating need not delay your assessment.

You will have been asked to fill in the questionnaire which is enclosed with your appointment card and you should bring this with you. We will discuss general aspects of your health including lifestyle, weight, diet, alcohol intake and smoking habits as appropriate.

**Please note if your BMI is 30-35 some investigations and treatment may have to be postponed until you have lost weight.**

**We strongly advise that both partners are non-smokers or working towards stopping smoking. (For NHS funded fertility treatment, both partners must be non-smokers and nicotine free).**

## The first appointment

Some of the initial tests may already have been arranged by your GP such as blood tests (female partner) or seminal analysis (male partner) and these do not have to be repeated unless a result is reported as unsatisfactory. The female partner will have a vaginal ultrasound scan to examine her uterus and ovaries. This is similar to having an internal examination and should not be uncomfortable. She must empty her bladder before having the scan done.

Please note that vaginal ultrasound scanning can still be carried out even if you are menstruating (unless you prefer not to be examined at this time). Once the initial discussion and assessment have been completed we may arrange further tests for one or both of you. Not all tests listed here are necessarily appropriate for you, but the list simply serves as a guide to what we may recommend for you.

## Female investigations

**Blood hormone levels** It is useful to measure some female hormones. Some of these tests are taken at a specific time in your cycle when expected levels indicate whether or not you have ovulated. It may be necessary to repeat some blood tests to confirm the diagnosis particularly if you have an irregular cycle or absent periods.

**Rubella (German measles)** If you are non-immune to rubella, there is a small risk of fetal abnormalities if you are exposed to rubella in early pregnancy. We may take a blood sample to make sure that you are immune and, if not, we will arrange for you to be vaccinated to protect any future pregnancy.

**Chlamydia** is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections. It is very easy to treat and cure but if left untreated can cause complications in females such as pelvic pain and infertility. If this test has not already been carried out, we will arrange a swab to be taken at your clinic appointment.

**Tubal patency testing** Healthy fallopian tubes are essential for pregnancy to occur. The tubes are delicate structures that can become blocked or damaged by adhesions or infection.

There are two methods of tubal patency testing and the Consultant or Nurse Specialist will advise which is the more appropriate for you:

- 1) Hysterosalpingogram** This is a special x ray of the fallopian tubes which involves injecting a small amount of radio-opaque (x ray sensitive) solution through the neck of your womb with a fine catheter. X rays will be taken as the solution travels through the fallopian tubes. The test takes only 10-15 minutes to complete and you do not need to stay in hospital.
- 2) Laparoscopy and hydrotubation** This is carried out under a general anaesthetic. Normally, you only have to stay in hospital for the morning or afternoon. A small incision is made just below the umbilicus and the abdomen is distended with gas which allows the consultant to insert a slim telescope into the pelvis and examine the uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries. A small amount of blue dye is injected through the cervix at the

same time to determine whether the fallopian tubes are patent. After the procedure the gas is released and a dissolving suture is used to close the incision. You will need to take up to a week off work afterwards.

## Male Investigations

**Semen analysis** This requires the male partner to produce a sample of semen by means of masturbation directly into a sterile container. The sample can be produced at home and brought to the laboratory within 30-45 minutes. If you live some distance away from the hospital and cannot submit the sample within the timescale recommended, we may be able to arrange for you to produce a sample in the clinic (a room with facilities will be made available to you). Please do not bring a sample with you at the initial appointment. If you have not already provided a sample we will arrange an appointment for you. If the first test is reported as unsatisfactory, a second test will be arranged 4 weeks or 3 months later, depending on the results of the test.

**Blood tests** Very occasionally we need to take a blood test from the male partner if the sperm count has been very low on two occasions. We will advise you if this is required.

## Results of investigations

The above tests may help diagnose the cause of your subfertility. We know that waiting for results is stressful for you and will make every effort to keep you informed as soon as possible. Please be aware that investigations can take a few weeks to complete as many have to be co-ordinated with the female menstrual cycle and, perhaps, repeated to make the diagnosis more certain. You will normally be informed of the results by letter or by telephone consultation with the Fertility Nurse Specialist.

If there is a specific cause found for your subfertility (e.g. problems with ovulation, sperm or tubal function) we will arrange to discuss this with you, and any worthwhile treatment options, at a further appointment. In many cases the cause of your inability to conceive will be “unexplained”, i.e. no obvious reason is found. In these cases, continuing to try and conceive naturally for a further reasonable length of time is usually more successful than introducing treatment, but we will advise you of this if appropriate.

# Notes

We are happy to consider requests for this publication in other languages or formats such as large print. Please call **01324 590886 (9-5)** to arrange this or email [fv.disabilitydepartment@nhs.scot](mailto:fv.disabilitydepartment@nhs.scot)

For all the latest health news visit [www.nhsforthvalley.com](http://www.nhsforthvalley.com)  
follow us on **twitter**  [@NHSForthValley](https://twitter.com/NHSForthValley)  
or like us on **facebook**  at [www.facebook.com/nhsforthvalley](http://www.facebook.com/nhsforthvalley)



**If you can't go let us know!**

Every month around 2,000 people across Forth Valley fail to turn up for hospital appointments. This costs the NHS millions of pounds each year and increases waiting times. So if you are unable to attend or no longer require your hospital appointment please let us know so we can offer it to someone else.

**Smoking** is not permitted anywhere on our hospital grounds and it is now an offence to smoke within 15 metres of a hospital building. This can result in a fixed penalty notice of £50 or a fine of up to £1,000.

