

The James Cook University Hospital  
Department of Reproductive Medicine

## INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL EGG DONORS

### In what situations should the use of donated eggs be considered?

The term “donation” applies to the gifting of your eggs or embryos for use in fertility treatment or, if you wish, research. Because of your donation, couples who are unable to conceive without the help of a third party can be given the opportunity to have the family they want.

Women who may benefit from donated eggs include those -

- Who are unable to produce eggs of their own.
- Who produce eggs of a poor quality.
- Whose ovaries have been removed.
- Who have experienced a premature menopause.
- Who are over the age of 40 years.

Egg donation may also be used when the use of a woman’s own eggs would involve a risk of passing on a serious inherited disease.

A woman receiving treatment with a donated egg is referred to as the recipient. The donated eggs are fertilised outside the body by sperm from the recipient’s partner. Up to two of the resulting embryos (fertilised eggs) are then transferred into the womb of the recipient. If all goes well, a normal pregnancy will follow. In some circumstances the treatment may use donated sperm as well as donated eggs.

### How you can donate sperm, eggs or embryos

In the UK, donation takes place at fertility clinics licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). Also, before beginning the process, you should be aware of all legal issues around your donation. For example, those who donated after 1 August 1991 are entitled to request information from the HFEA about the number, sex, and year of birth of any people born as a result of their donation.

Treatment and research using donated eggs is licensed and regulated by the HFEA under the terms of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

Within the UK, in order to donate you will need to contact a fertility clinic that is licensed by the HFEA to receive donations. All clinics where a woman can donate eggs have been inspected and licensed by the HFEA, and the clinic has a legal obligation to record a donor’s name and some details about her.

## Why should I donate through a licensed clinic ?

All HFEA-licensed clinics must conform to strict medical, legal, and ethical standards. This ensures that everyone involved in the donation is clear about their legal position and is protected by law.

Eggs and embryos donated through a clinic must be screened for certain medical conditions. Eggs and embryos will also be quarantined for six months. This helps ensure babies born from donated eggs or embryos are healthy and that there are no risks to the woman who receives them.

We suggest you discuss these tests with a member of our nursing team.

## Personal and family health

We will seek your permission to contact your doctor directly regarding personal and family health issues. There are some conditions, such as asthma, which will require further consideration, but will not necessarily exclude you from donation.

You will be asked to complete a lengthy questionnaire about your health with particular emphasis on hereditary disease. If any such disorders are present in your family you may be excluded from donating your eggs.

The department of reproductive medicine will usually also need to perform certain physical examinations such as a blood pressure check. Blood samples are required for certain hormone tests, blood grouping, a chromosome analysis, and to check that you are not a carrier of hepatitis or HIV.

It is important to understand that, regardless of their impact upon whether you may donate eggs or not, the results of such tests may have implications for your own health. Tests for HIV and for hepatitis are performed as a screening test prior to your being accepted as an egg donor. The same test will be repeated immediately prior to egg donation and may also be required again six months later if any spare embryos have been cryopreserved (frozen for future use).

## Counselling

There are many considerations to be taken into account when deciding to donate your eggs. To help you, all licensed clinics can offer you the opportunity to talk through any issues and concerns you may have with someone not immediately involved with your treatment.

Our independent counsellor is Janet Owen, and she can be contacted on mobile 07951579785 Monday-Friday, 09.00 am – 5.00 pm.

Counselling can be a useful opportunity to discuss with an impartial person any concerns you may have about any aspect of becoming a donor and its implications for you and your family. It is a condition of egg sharing that you undergo counselling regarding the implications of egg sharing and that your partner must attend the counselling. This counselling will include, amongst other issues:

- The implications of knowing or of not knowing whether the other couple or couples have conceived from your eggs or not.
- The implications for the provider of herself remaining childless.
- The implications of there possibly being half-siblings of a similar age resulting from the treatment, and possibly living close together.
- The implications of an individual conceived from your eggs having the right to know your identity, once he or she reaches the age of 18.

## Consent

Written consent must be given before a cycle of egg donation commences. You should only give your consent once you are satisfied that you understand what you are agreeing to. You will be asked to make important choices. You should feel that you have had the opportunity to consider the implications of what it is you are being asked to agree to.

The HFEA states “*You must give your individual consent to the use and storage of your own gametes or embryos created. You will be able to vary or withdraw this consent until such time as the embryos that may have been created have been implanted.*”

This means that you are free to withdraw your offer of egg donation at any time prior to the transfer of any resulting embryos into the recipient’s womb. Should you experience any doubts regarding your decision to continue it is important that you raise your concerns with a member of staff.

Your eggs remain entirely your own property until they have been fertilised with sperm. From that point onwards they become embryos. An embryo is created as a result of the joining of an egg and a sperm together. If you change your mind at this point the embryos so created will not be used in treatment, but will be allowed to perish.

Once the embryos have been transferred into the womb of the recipient you will no longer have any legal rights over them. The recipient woman who has had the embryos transferred into her and her partner will become the legal parents of any resulting child or children. Donors have no relationship in law with any child resulting from treatment using eggs that they have donated and no obligations or rights over that child.

Every treatment cycle, and every resulting pregnancy and birth, is registered confidentially with the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). This is the statutory authority, which licences all IVF centres. At each treatment we will inform the Authority of the names and dates of birth of all the parties involved - male, female, and donor. The HFEA keeps on record certain information about donors: name, date of birth, race, height, weight, colour of hair, colour of eyes, skin colour, occupation, interests, and whether they have any children of their own. Donors are also invited if they wish to write a few sentences (or more) about themselves as a person, providing information of possible interest to any child conceived in this way. This section might include non-identifying information about the donor’s interests, family background, childhood, region of origin, etc.

Until recently, women who donated eggs could choose to do so anonymously. Donors had to give identifying details for the HFEA register, but these records were and remain confidential. People could apply to find out if they were conceived using donated eggs or sperm or embryos. They could also check whether they were genetically related to someone that they wanted to marry. However, they did not have the right to know who the donor was.

On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 a new law came into effect. Anyone conceived from eggs or sperm donated after 1<sup>st</sup> April 2005 will, upon reaching age 18, have the right to know who the donor was.

It will obviously be up to the person conceived from donated eggs or sperm to make enquiries from the HFEA. There is no suggestion that the HFEA would ever contact such a person other than in reply to his or her own enquiries.

People conceived from donated eggs or embryos will have the right to find the identity of the egg or embryo donor. However, such donors will have no responsibilities to individuals conceived by the use of their eggs or embryos. The donors will be under no obligation even to respond to any correspondence from the individuals so conceived.

For further information please visit the [HFEA website](#).

## Other issues

More than one couple may benefit from your donation depending upon the number of eggs you produce during the egg donation cycle. There is therefore the potential for more than one couple to achieve a family from your egg donation. If you continue to fulfil the criteria for egg donation, you may if you wish donate your eggs on more than one occasion. The HFEA limit the number of successful pregnancies from the donated eggs of any individual donor to a maximum of ten. In reality, this is far more than egg donors can normally expect to achieve.

Some women who are recipients of donor eggs may be fortunate to have surplus embryos as a result of their IVF treatment cycle. Clinics are only permitted to replace up to two embryos in a woman's womb during any one treatment cycle as replacing more than one embryo increases the likelihood of multiple pregnancy. If the available embryos are suitable for cryopreservation and the couple agree such embryos may be frozen and stored for later use.

As a donor, if your eggs have been fertilised and the embryos created subsequently stored, there is a minimum quarantine period of six months. Following this quarantine period you must have a repeat blood test to screen for HIV before the embryos can be used. During this time you retain legal rights over the embryos until they are transferred into the recipient. If during this time you wish to withdraw your consent you must contact and inform the clinic of your decision immediately. If you do not attend for this important blood test the embryos will not be available for treatment and will therefore have to be destroyed.

## What happens during egg donation?

From your point of view the treatment will proceed exactly as it would if you were having IVF without donating any of your eggs. The only difference is that some of your eggs will be

donated. The course of an IVF cycle is described in a separate information sheet which you should read in conjunction with this one.

We will do our best to ensure that you have two embryos to transfer, and in order to achieve this we will leave four reasonable eggs for your own use. Any eggs that you produce over and above this figure may be allocated to other recipients for their own use.

### **Further information**

For more information regarding egg donation please contact a member of our nursing team directly on 01642 854836. In addition you may wish to contact the National Gamete Donation Trust on Tel: 0161 276 6000. Website: <http://www.ngdt.co.uk/>