

Donating sperm, eggs or embryos



The donation of sperm, eggs or embryos to help a couple have a child is one of the most generous gifts anyone can give. But the decision to donate can have far-reaching consequences for you, the people who receive your donation, any children that are born as a result, and for your own family.



What do I need to think about before donating?

Donating can have an emotional impact on the people who receive your donation, the donor child, and you and your family.

In a legal and social sense, the people who receive your donation will be the parents of any child that is born. But the child will inherit your genes and therefore they, and any children of theirs, will be genetically related to you. You should consider how you feel about this now and try to imagine how you may feel in the future.

As the law now stands, once they reach 18 anyone born as a result of your donation will be able to find out who you are, and may want to get in touch. You need to think about this carefully and discuss it with your family.

What does the law say about donation?

In the past, people who donated sperm, eggs or embryos could choose to remain anonymous. Donors had to give identifying details for our Register, but these stayed confidential. Under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990, people could apply to find out if they were conceived using donated sperm, eggs or embryos. They could also check whether they were related to someone they wanted to marry, but they did not have the right to know who the donor was.

On 1 April 2005 a new law came into effect, which allows people conceived through donations made after this date to find out who their donor was, once they reach 18.

What does the change in law mean to me?

Because the new law gives donor-conceived people the right to know your identity once they reach 18, they could contact you in the future. Not all donor-conceived people will want to do this. You may want to think about how you would feel if they did and consider how this could affect those close to you.

What will children have been told about me?

This depends to a certain extent on you and to a certain extent on the child's parents. Parents can obtain the non-identifying information that you provided on your registration form.

Many parents of donor-conceived children will have shared what they know about you. This is why we urge you to put as much detail as you can on your registration form.

Do I have any say about how my sperm, eggs or embryos are used?

You can say who you wish to receive your sperm, eggs or embryos. For example, you may have decided to donate to a friend or a relative. It is also possible to specify certain conditions if you are donating to people you do not know, although if you impose too many restrictions, the clinic may not accept you as a donor.

How many children could be born from my donation?

Your sperm, eggs or embryos can be used in the treatment of up to 10 families within the UK. There is no limit on the number of children each family may have. You can specify a lower number of families should you wish to. You may find it helpful to talk this through with a counsellor.

Why should I donate through a clinic rather than making a private arrangement?

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 the law.

All non-partner sperm, eggs and embryos donated through a clinic must be screened for certain medical conditions as well as sexually transmitted diseases and quarantined for 6 months. This helps to ensure that babies born from donated sperm, eggs or embryos are healthy, and that there are no risks to the woman who receives them.

We suggest you discuss these tests with staff at the clinic.

What if I change my mind?

By law, when you donate you must consent in writing to your sperm, eggs or embryos being used for treatment. You can change your mind up to the point at which your donation is used in treatment. This means that you can change or withdraw your consent after you have donated.

However, given that fertility treatment is costly, time-consuming and emotionally and physically stressful, it is important to be sure beforehand that you really want to donate.

Do I have any responsibilities towards a child created from my eggs or sperm?

You have no legal obligations to any child created from your donation. The person who received your donation (and their partner if they have one) will be the child's legal parent(s).

You cannot be named on the birth certificate and have no rights over how the child is brought up, nor will you have any responsibility to contribute financially. However, as you are genetically related to the child you may feel you have certain emotional and psychological responsibilities.

If you are considering donating fresh sperm for use in treatment outside a clinic (through an internet company or for someone to use at home, for example), you are considered by law to be the father of the child, with the rights and responsibilities this involves.

Could I be sued for any reason?

A donor-conceived person born with an abnormality could sue you for damages if it was proven that you had deliberately not told the clinic of relevant facts about your, or your family's, medical history when you donated. This is why it is important to tell the clinic of any inherited disabilities or physical or mental illnesses affecting you or anyone in your family.

Useful contacts

British Infertility Counselling Association (BICA)

BICA aims to promote high quality, accessible counselling services for those with fertility problems. www.bica.net Tel: 01744 750 660

Donor Conception Network (DC Network)

Information and support for people planning, or who have, children conceived using donated sperm or eggs.

www.dcnetwork.org Tel: 020 8245 4369

Infertility Network UK (I N UK)

Charity providing practical and emotional support for people experiencing difficulties in conceiving.

www.infertilitynetworkuk.com Tel: 08701 188 088

National Gamete Donation Trust (NGDT)

A registered charity and central reference point for donors, recipients and health professionals. www.ngdt.co.uk Tel: 0845 226 9193

Further reading

Donating: What else does it involve? factsheet

Download a copy from the 'Publications' section of 'For Patients' on www.hfea.gov.uk

Donating your eggs for research factsheet

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