



Understanding your IVF journey

Patient Information



Summary of the IVF journey

In vitro fertilisation (IVF) is a fertility treatment where eggs are fertilised with sperm in a laboratory. It is usually recommended when pregnancy hasn't occurred, and can help with challenges like blocked fallopian tubes, ovulation issues, sperm quality or unexplained infertility.

Who is IVF suitable for?

ICSI [IVF](#) can support many people who are finding it difficult to conceive naturally or who need help to start or grow their family. It may be considered when first-line [fertility treatments](#), such as ovulation induction or [intrauterine insemination \(IUI\)](#), have not been successful or aren't suitable.

You may be offered IVF if:

- Your fallopian tubes (the tubes that carry eggs to the uterus) are blocked or damaged, making it difficult for the egg and sperm to meet
- You have ovulation problems or irregular menstrual cycles
- You have been diagnosed with unexplained infertility
- There are male factor fertility challenges, such as a low sperm count, poor motility or abnormal sperm shape
- You're using donor sperm or donor eggs to conceive
- You're preserving [your fertility](#) before medical treatment, such as chemotherapy or surgery
- You're a single person or a [same-sex couple](#) wanting to start a family through donor treatment

Your fertility specialist will discuss your circumstances and history with you in detail and confirm whether IVF is the most suitable treatment option for you.

The IVF process step-by-step

IVF involves several carefully planned stages, designed to give you the best possible chance of pregnancy. Your specialist will guide you through each step, explaining what to expect so you feel supported throughout your treatment.

At BCRM, your IVF journey typically includes the following stages:

- **Ovarian stimulation** – you'll take medication to stimulate your ovaries and encourage the development of multiple mature eggs. During this time, you'll have regular ultrasound scans and blood tests so [our team](#) can monitor your progress and adjust your medication if needed
- **Egg collection** – once your eggs are ready, they'll be collected during a short procedure carried out under sedation. A fine needle is used to retrieve the eggs from your ovaries. You will go home the same day
- **Fertilisation** – in the laboratory, your collected eggs are combined with sperm to allow fertilisation to occur. If there are concerns about sperm quality or fertilisation, your specialist may recommend [intracytoplasmic sperm injection \(ICSI\)](#), where a single sperm is injected directly into each egg
- **Embryo culture and selection** – the fertilised eggs (embryos) are carefully cultured in our laboratory for several days. Our embryologists monitor their development and select the healthiest embryos for transfer. In some cases, [preimplantation genetic testing \(PGT-A\)](#) may be recommended to check for chromosomal abnormalities
- **Embryo transfer** – the selected embryo is placed into your womb using a fine catheter. This is a quick and straightforward procedure that usually doesn't require anaesthetic
- **After your transfer** – following your embryo transfer, you'll be given hormonal medication to help support the lining of your womb and encourage implantation. You'll then take a pregnancy test around two weeks later

Every IVF journey is unique, and your specialist will tailor your treatment plan to suit your medical history, lifestyle and fertility needs.

IVF results

While no fertility treatment can guarantee pregnancy, IVF has helped many people conceive when other approaches have not worked. [Success rates](#) depend on factors such as your age, egg quality, sperm health and medical history.

At BCRM, our results are among the highest in the South West. For women under 35, our live birth rate per embryo transfer is almost double the national average. This reflects our commitment to personalised care, advanced laboratory techniques and ongoing research.

Each person's [journey](#) is different, and your specialist will discuss your individual chances of success based on your medical background. Even when pregnancy does not occur after one cycle, many people go on to achieve success with further treatment.

Risks to consider before IVF treatment

IVF has been used safely for more than four decades, leading to the birth of millions of healthy children worldwide. However, as with any medical procedure, it carries some potential risks and considerations, such as:

- **Ovarian hyperstimulation syndrome (OHSS)** – this can occur when the ovaries respond too strongly to stimulation medication, leading to discomfort, bloating and, in rare cases, more serious symptoms. Your treatment will be carefully monitored to minimise this risk
- **Multiple pregnancy** – IVF slightly increases the chance of twins or triplets if more than one embryo is transferred. Single embryo transfer is usually recommended to give you the best chance of one healthy pregnancy
- **Ectopic pregnancy** – there is a small risk that an embryo could implant outside the womb, usually in a fallopian tube. This is uncommon, and we monitor closely for early signs
- **Emotional and physical effects** – IVF can sometimes feel physically and emotionally demanding. You may experience tiredness, mood changes or anxiety during treatment. [Our counselling and patient support services](#) are available whenever you need them

Your specialist will explain each stage of treatment in detail so you can make informed decisions with confidence and feel supported throughout your IVF journey.

Pregnancy outcomes

Some studies have found a small increase in certain pregnancy complications, such as low birth weight or premature birth, in babies conceived through IVF. These risks are generally low, and most babies born following IVF are healthy. Experts believe the difference may reflect a mix of patient and treatment-related factors rather than IVF alone.

Your fertility specialist will discuss any personal risk factors before you begin and help you decide whether IVF is the most appropriate treatment for you.

Emotional support and counselling

Fertility treatment can be a very emotional experience. While IVF offers hope, it can also bring feelings of stress, uncertainty and anxiety, especially during the waiting periods between appointments or results.

At [BCRM](#), we recognise that your emotional wellbeing is just as important as your physical health. Our counsellors provide confidential support before, during and after treatment. Whether you want to talk through your worries, explore coping strategies or share how you're feeling, our counselling team is here to listen and help.

You are welcome to attend sessions alone or with your partner. Making use of this service can help with processing emotions, improving communication and feeling more in control throughout your journey.

Questions and concerns about starting your IVF journey

Starting IVF can feel overwhelming, and it's normal to have questions or uncertainties about the process. Our team understands that every situation is unique, and we're always happy to explain any part of your treatment in more detail.

You'll have opportunities to ask questions throughout your appointments, and our nurses, embryologists and consultants will ensure you fully understand your treatment plan.

If you have any additional concerns or would like more information, please [contact our friendly team](#). We'll take the time to discuss your options and support you every step of the way.



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