

Understanding your Sperm Test



The sperm test is fundamental to fertility care and treatment – there's no getting around that fact... but having a sperm test shouldn't be embarrassing or frightening. It's a normal medical test and lots of them are done every day.

There is lots of incorrect information about sperm tests that you might read, hear, or be told. Sometimes you might have seen sperm tests on television or at the movies – typically played for laughs. So let's get serious about sperm tests... and make sure that before you have a sperm test you understand all you need to know!

Booking a Sperm Test

Some important information about your sperm needs to be obtained quickly. In particular, the pattern of movement of the sperm changes very quickly after the specimen is given. If the specimen is not analysed by the fertility scientist within a matter of minutes, the results can be misleading. For this reason, it is important to book the test so that the laboratory are expecting the sample and can deal with it straight away.



It is usually best to give the sperm specimen at the laboratory, but in some cases it can be produced at home and delivered. If you are giving a home specimen, then make sure the sample is **kept warm** and **brought to the lab without any delays**.

Your Sperm Test Results...

The results of sperm tests are quite variable, so don't be discouraged if your initial results aren't as reassuring as you and your partner had hoped for. Simple events can change the results of a sperm test quite dramatically. For example, being ill and having a fever can reduce the number of sperm a great deal – in some cases, if a man has a prolonged and high fever he may have no sperm at all for a month or two after he has recovered. Other simple things – lots of recent ejaculation, or using certain medications or marijuana, for example, can affect things. If you have a concerning sperm test result, it is important to repeat the test in a couple of weeks – your doctor should arrange this.

What does a Sperm Test tell your doctor?

There are a number of important pieces of information in a sperm test result, and each of them has a different meaning. Let's learn about the different components of a sperm test result.

Sperm "concentration"

The **concentration** of sperm is the number of sperm in each millilitre (mL) of semen. There is obviously a great deal of variability, even in the same man's sperm samples over time. However, a normal result is a concentration of 15 million sperm or more in each mL of semen.

Sperm "count"

The typical amount of semen in an ejaculation is between three and five millilitres. The count is the total amount of sperm in the whole ejaculation. Normal fertility would be 50 million sperm or more.

Sperm "Motility"

The word **motility** means "movement." Healthy sperm move constantly and, importantly, move in a "forward" direction. A healthy level of movement would be about half of all of the sperm moving in a "forward direction." This results is the most sensitive to delays in analysis, and movement can seem low if there are delays in a sperm specimen being analysed at the laboratory.



Sperm "Morphology"

The word **morphology** means "shape." Sperm have lots of different shapes, so this can be the most challenging for the scientist to describe properly. Many people are surprised to hear that the majority of sperm have an abnormal shape. Fortunately, only a small proportion of sperm need to have a normal shape. Fertility is usually considered normal if about one in every 20 sperm (5%) have a normal shape.

Some other sperm changes...

Some other changes might be abnormal amounts of ejaculate – less or more than average – or the presence of infection. It is important to remember that the first step to take after finding an abnormal sperm test... is to repeat the test a couple of weeks later.