



Consultation with a fertility doctor

Information for women with a diagnosis of breast cancer only

Your breast care nurse, breast surgeon or doctor will have already told you that some treatments for breast cancer are likely to affect your ability to have children naturally (your fertility). Because of this you have been offered a consultation with a specialist fertility doctor at St Mary's Hospital. This is to discuss the options open to you if you would like to have children after your cancer treatment. It is your choice whether you see a fertility expert, and we hope the information in this leaflet will help you decide.

What can the fertility doctor do?

The specialist fertility doctor can discuss the options available to you if you would like to try to have children after your cancer treatment. It is important that you think carefully about whether you would like to see a fertility doctor as some of the procedures which may be recommended cannot be carried out once you start your cancer treatment.

You may be able to have treatment to stimulate your ovaries to produce eggs before you start your cancer treatment. This is so some of your eggs can be collected and stored for use at a later date, or so that they can be fertilized outside your body and stored (embryo storage). If you cannot have these procedures, you can be offered information about other options which may be available, such as donor eggs, surrogacy or adoption.

The consultation with the fertility expert is not part of your cancer treatment, so fertility treatment itself should not affect your physical recovery from the cancer. If you do opt to have fertility treatment your treatment for your cancer may be delayed. Your cancer doctor will liaise with the fertility expert, and will be able to advise you about any potential effects of delaying the start of your cancer treatment.

Women have reported that having such a consultation has helped them to address their concerns, whether they went ahead with fertility treatment or not.

What should I do if I would like an appointment with a fertility expert?

Please speak to your breast surgeon or breast care nurse as soon as possible. They will then get in touch with the fertility service to arrange an appointment.

When will I receive an appointment for my fertility consultation?

You are likely to be seen by a fertility expert within seven working days of your doctor or breast care nurse contacting them to arrange an appointment. As you will be contacted at short notice to arrange the appointment it is extremely important that you make sure that your contact details are up to date. You need to provide details of as many methods of contacting you as possible (for example, home phone, mobile, work phone).

What will happen during my consultation with the fertility doctor?

You will have the opportunity to discuss the likely impact of your breast cancer treatment on your fertility, as well as the possible options for preserving your fertility. These will depend on your circumstances and wishes. You will also be told about the likely success of any fertility treatments you may be able to have, how long these treatments can take, and the risks involved.

Will I need any tests or investigations during my visit to the fertility specialist?

You will need to have some tests carried out if you decide to proceed with treatment to preserve your fertility. These will be carried out as soon as possible, and this may be at your first appointment. The results of these tests will help the fertility expert to decide whether you will be able to have the fertility treatment suggested. The fertility specialist will tell you more about any tests you may need, when these will be carried out and what happens next.

If I have a partner, do they need to be present during my fertility consultation?

It is a good idea for your partner to attend the consultation with you, as information you will be given may be of interest and relevance to them.

What if I want to talk further with somebody about fertility issues after my consultation?

If you have any concerns or questions after your consultation you will be able to talk to a fertility counsellor at St Mary's Hospital. This is available whether you decide to have fertility preservation treatment or not. You will be given more information about this service at your consultation.

You also have the option of talking to an oncologist (doctor who specialises in cancer drug treatment) who has a particular interest in fertility concerns. See section below 'Additional Referral to Oncologist'.

If I decide to pursue treatment to preserve my fertility, will I then have to pay for treatment to try to establish a pregnancy?

Current NHS guidelines are that women under 40 years old who do not already have children can have treatment to try and establish a pregnancy (in vitro fertilization, or IVF) at no cost to them. However, the number of cycles of IVF funded by the NHS will depend on your Primary Care Trust (PCT). If you need further treatment after the NHS-funded cycles you will have to fund it yourself. If you have health insurance you should check with your insurer whether your cover includes such treatment. If your circumstances do not fit with NHS funding criteria and you wish to pursue treatment to establish a pregnancy, private options will be discussed.

What happens if I do not want to pursue fertility preservation options?

Whether you wish to pursue the options for preserving your fertility is entirely your choice. If you decide you do not wish to, please inform your breast care nurse or surgeon and your cancer treatment will go ahead as planned.

Is there any further written information I can have about the impact of cancer treatment on fertility, and fertility preservation options?

Your breast care nurse or fertility doctor will be able to tell you about written information that is available. They can also tell you if there is a cancer information and support centre in your area, where you will be able to get written information and talk through any concerns you may have. The Christie has cancer information and support centres you can contact at Withington (0161 446 8100), Salford (0161 918 7804) and Oldham (0161 918 7745). You can also contact Macmillan Cancer Support (phone: 0808 808 0000) or Breast Cancer Care (phone 0808 800 6000) and ask them to send you information you would like.

You can contact Macmillan Cancer Support on the above number to request a free copy of a leaflet 'Female Cancer and Fertility' or Breast Cancer Care on the above number to request free copy of 'Fertility Issues and Breast Cancer Treatment.

Additional referral to oncologist for patients with breast cancer

Why do I need an additional referral to an oncologist?

You are already being or have been referred to a fertility specialist at St Mary's Hospital to discuss any fertility concerns before starting treatment for breast cancer. Some patients may be concerned about the impact of potential fertility preservation treatments on their breast cancer. Having the opportunity to also talk to a doctor who specialises in breast cancer treatment at this time may be helpful.

Why would seeing an oncologist be helpful at this stage?

To assist your decision-making, it may be helpful for you to also have a separate consultation with an oncologist to discuss the potential effect of having fertility treatment on your breast cancer and the impact of breast cancer treatments on your fertility. This would be an additional consultation to the fertility appointment at St Mary's Hospital and take place at The Christie.

By who and how will I be referred?

In the Greater Manchester and Cheshire Cancer Network there are two oncologists, Dr Anne Armstrong and Dr Juliet Loncaster, with a specialist interest in fertility concerns for women with breast cancer. Your surgical team can refer you to Dr Armstrong or Dr Loncaster at the same time that you are referred to St Mary's.

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