



Male Infertility: Are You Informed?

By Dr. Ronald D. Lee, M.D.



Background

Infertility affects 15% of couples attempting to achieve pregnancy. In 30% of cases, the male is the primary cause of the couple's infertility, and in an additional 20% of cases, he is a contributing factor. Initial screening of the male should be done when no pregnancy

has occurred within 1 year of unprotected intercourse, a known male infertility risk exists, a known female factor exists, or a man questions his fertility potential. Studies have shown that the best chance for a couple to achieve pregnancy is when both members of the partnership are evaluated simultaneously. For the male, that means a thorough history and physical and at least one screening semen analysis. Depending on the results of these exams, other tests may be indicated.

Who to See

Men are often reluctant to come in for evaluation. Initial screening of the male can be done quickly and in a cost effective manner by a physician trained in male infertility, usually a Urologist or Andrologist. Specialized treatment, including microsurgery, should be done by a Urologist with advanced training in microsurgical techniques and treatment of the infertile male.

Causes of Male Infertility

Male infertility may be caused by a number of

conditions. Some are reversible and some are not reversible but may still be treated using assisted reproductive technologies (ART) utilizing the available sperm from the male. Common conditions that may cause male infertility include varicoceles (varicose veins of the testes), endocrine abnormalities, semen volume problems, infections, testicular damage, and genetic abnormalities.

Recent Advances

Much progress has been made in the past 10 years in the identification and treatment of male factor infertility. Genetic testing can often identify potential causes of male factor infertility and allow assessment of risk of transmission to offspring. Microsurgical techniques are used to repair varicoceles, extract sperm from the testes, and repair obstructed tubes in the vas deferens or epididymis (a system of ductules emerging posteriorly from the testis that holds sperm during maturation). In addition, assisted reproductive technologies allow the fertilization of a single ovum with a single sperm.

Lifestyle Suggestions

Not all male factor infertility requires medication, surgery, or ART. Lifestyle may adversely affect a man's fertility. Hot tubs, tobacco, recreational drugs, excessive alcohol, and high stress have all been implicated in decreasing male fertility potential and should be reduced or eliminated. A working knowledge of the female ovulation cycle and timing of intercourse are also of great benefit. A careful review of all prescription and over-the-counter drugs, including herbal

therapies, must be performed since many of these treatments may additionally be harmful to sperm.

Expert Resource Available

Dr. Ronald Lee, recognized nationally in male infertility medicine, has completed a fellowship in male infertility. He has been active in this branch for over 20 years and has assisted hundreds of couples in achieving their dreams of a family. To set up an appointment for consultation, please call 847-823-3185.

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