**How will I know if my fertility has been affected by cancer?**

Not everyone who has cancer and its treatment will end up with fertility problems. Many will go on to have children naturally. After your treatment finishes, there are tests you can have to help assess your fertility, but not everyone will want to know. The decision is yours and it is important you do things in your own time. You have been through an extremely difficult situation. Waiting until you feel more physically and emotionally stable before finding out about your fertility status may be a good option.

In this fact sheet we discuss the tests available to assess both men and women’s fertility after cancer treatment. We also discuss where you can get further information and support. If and when you do decide to find out about your fertility you may like to bring along your partner, friend or relative when you have the tests and to get the results back from these tests.

The information in this factsheet does not replace talking to your doctors or nurses. It aims to act as a tool to help you prepare questions you can ask your healthcare team about your individual situation.

**Fertility test for women after cancer treatment**

After your treatment you will be able to talk to your cancer doctors or fertility specialist about how you treatment may have affected your fertility. They will not be able to give you definite answers about whether or not you can get pregnant or if a pregnancy will be successful. However, they will be able to do several tests to assess your fertility. A woman’s fertility is dependent on several factors such as her age and the number of eggs she has left in her ovaries. Women are born with the total number of eggs they will have in their life. They will not make more.

**Blood tests**

* **Follicle stimulating hormone (FSH):** this blood test measures FSH which can show how close you are to menopause.
* **Anti-müllerian hormone (AMH):** this blood tests measures AMH which is a hormone secreted by the follicles. Fertility experts are uncertain about the value of this test as this hormone has been shown to be lower in women with breast cancer. However, it may be something your specialist offers you before and after your treatment.

**Scans**

* **Transvaginal ultrasound:** This is a type of scanner inserted into the vagina to look at the structure and condition of the reproductive organs (uterus, fallopian tubes and ovaries).
* **Ovarian volume:** using a transvaginal ultrasound your doctor can test the volume of your ovaries. The normal combined volume of both ovaries is around 10 ml. Women who have volume lower than 4ml usually find becoming pregnant difficult.
* **Antral follicle count (AFC):** A transvaginal ultrasound is used to look at the ovaries and follicles on day three of the menstrual cycle.

**Does having my periods after treatment mean I can become pregnant?**

Some women’s periods (menstruation) may stop or become irregular during or after their cancer and its treatment. If your periods stop permanently it means you have gone through menopause and you won’t be able to become pregnant. You will be infertile.

If your periods come back after treatment, it may mean you are fertile, but not always. Unfortunately, your doctor will not be able to tell you whether or not your periods will come back until after you have competed your cancer treatment. For some women their period will return within a couple of months after they complete their cancer treatment but for others their period will not return.

**Fertility test for men after cancer treatment**

After treatment a man will be able to have semen analysis to test whether or not he is producing sperm. The test will be able to assess how many sperm the male is producing, as well as how healthy and active (how well they move) his sperm are. To do this test you will need to go into a private room and masturbate and ejaculate into a container. This will then be taken to the laboratory to analyse under a microscope.

If you are able to have an erection and ejaculate after your treatment this does not always mean you are fertile. The results from the semen analysis will allow your fertility specialist to assess whether or not you are likely to be able to father a child. If you stored semen prior to treatment, your specialist can analyse this as well to compare your results.

**What will I do if my fertility has been affected?**

Finding out your fertility has been affected by your cancer and its treatment can be devastating news. However, it does not always mean you won’t be able to have children. Many people will go on to have children naturally but it may take longer than you hoped. Others may need to have fertility treatment to help them conceive. Or you may consider adoption or surrogacy. Your medical team will be able to guide you as to where to get further information and support for your individual situation.

**Questions for your doctor**

* How will I know if I will be able to have children after my cancer treatment is finished?
* Are there any tests I can have to test my fertility? If so, what are they and how accurate are they?
* If I am infertile how will this affect my sexuality?
* What other options are there for me for having children if my fertility has been affected?
* Where can I go to get further help and support?

**Where to get further help and information**

It is important you find out as much as you can about possible fertility problems you may have before and after your cancer treatment. Fertility preservation is an important part of the lead up to your treatment. Discuss these with your specialist before your treatment begins. Below is a list of resources you may find helpful.

* **Future Fertility factsheets**: Having a baby after cancer [LINK], Adoption after cancer treatment[LINK],Surrogacy after cancer treatment[LINK], Having sexual relationships before and after cancer treatment[LINK] and Fertility preservation [LINK]
* Fertility after Cancer. A guide for people with cancer, family and friends. First published June 2014. © Cancer Council Australia 2014.

You may also like to call a Cancer Helpline service:

* Australia 13 11 20
* New Zealand call 0800 **226 237**

Both these help lines will allow you to have a confidential conversation with an experienced cancer nurse.