

Semen Analysis



Why test sperm?

For pregnancy to occur, plenty of healthy sperm must arrive in the vagina. The sperm will travel through the cervix, and into the fallopian tube. If there is a delay in becoming pregnant, in as many as one third of cases there is a problem with the sperm. Testing for problems with sperm is an important part of working out why there are delays in pregnancy.

What do the results of a sperm test mean?

A sperm test will provide a great deal of information, and a number of studies are performed.

The amount of semen produced

The typical volume of semen ejaculated is between 3 and 5 mL.

The number of sperm in the specimen

For a man with normal fertility, the usual concentration of sperm is somewhere between about 15 million and 60 million sperm in each mL of semen.

The movement of the sperm

Healthy sperm should move in a rhythmic manner, and about half of sperm should be moving forward.

Shape of the sperm

Most sperm have an abnormal shape. For a healthy man, about 5% of all of the sperm should have a normal shape.

Other tests sometimes performed

DNA integrity

When sperm are exposed to 'oxidant stress' in the body – from smoking, poor diet, overweight, or infrequent ejaculation – the DNA (genetic material) in the sperm might be damaged. It is possible to test for the integrity of the sperm.

Antibodies

In some cases, for example after a vasectomy, the man's own body might treat sperm as a foreign cell, and develop an immune response. This can lead to antibodies attaching to the sperm and reducing their function and fertility.

Don't rely on a single sperm test result...

It is normal for the number and quality of sperm produced to vary, and even very fertile men can produce a sample that has disappointing results. If there is a problem with the results of a sperm test, it is usual to repeat the test and check subsequent samples.

