

# 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.

