

# Fertility Treatment Guidance

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# Why talk about fertility treatment?

Infertility problems are extremely common in the UK. According to the NHS, around 1 in 7 couples may have difficulty conceiving. This is approximately 3.5 million people in the UK.

Infertility can have a profound impact on an individual's mental health and on their wellbeing as a whole. Physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, and financial aspects of one's life can all be affected. The most common mental health concerns reported by fertility patients are symptoms of anxiety and depression, and this can have a lasting impact on someone's ability to undertake their work properly.

Queen Mary recognises the emotional and physical challenges which may arise from undergoing fertility treatments, and supports members of staff who wish to undertake fertility treatment. These guidelines are intended to assist line managers support eligible staff members in the logistical and emotional aspects of undergoing treatment.

There are 3 main types of fertility treatment:

- medicines
- surgical procedures
- assisted conception – including intrauterine insemination (IUI) and in vitro fertilisation (IVF)

A full list of fertility treatment options can be found here: <https://www.hfea.gov.uk/treatments/>

## Eligibility and proposed action

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This policy applies to all staff undergoing fertility treatment. Throughout the policy we will refer to 'employee' and 'staff'. Any employee undertaking fertility investigations or treatment are encouraged to discuss their situation with their line manager or with their HR Adviser. Managers should treat such information with sensitivity and confidentiality.

Investigations regarding infertility, consultations exploring treatment options and medical interventions aimed at assisting conception should be regarded as medical appointments and time off to attend such appointments should be given in the usual manner for a medical appointment. In addition, line managers should adopt a flexible approach to working for the duration of the treatment, so that the employee may request to work from home on the day of an appointment, to avoid travelling into work for short periods of time.

In the case of IVF, once a fertilised egg has been implanted in the uterus, a person is deemed legally to be pregnant. From that time, they are legally protected from unfavourable treatment for the duration of their pregnancy, and is entitled to time off for antenatal care and pregnancy-related sickness, as per the University's ante-natal leave guidance. Managers should bear in mind the usual Health and Safety procedures associated with staff who are or may be pregnant, and should follow the guidance which can be found in the [Risk Assessment for Pregnant Employees and Employees that have recently given birth](#). Both the ante-natal leave guidance and risk assessment form can be found on the University's webpages here: <http://hr.qmul.ac.uk/procedures/leave/maternity/>

## Requesting leave

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There is no statutory right for an employee to take time off work in connection with infertility investigations or treatment before the stage at which they are pregnant. Queen Mary does however recognise that eligible members of staff may require unforeseen time off before or after fertility treatment.

In common with other leave options, staff should request leave in advance where possible. Below are examples of how an employee might need to use leave for the purposes of undergoing fertility treatment.

Time off	Reason
Medical appointment	Investigating reasons for infertility; initial exploratory consultations regarding treatment options; collecting ova; ova implantation; IUI; other treatment options
Sickness Leave	Recovering from the effects of a procedure; illness arising from pregnancy; illness arising due to fertility treatment. Sick pay entitlement will be in accordance with the normal entitlements

## Glossary of terms:

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A full glossary can be found [here](#).

**Infertility** – Failure to conceive after regular unprotected sexual intercourse.

**Intra Cytoplasmic Sperm Injection (ICSI)** – A process in which a single sperm is inserted directly into the cytoplasm of an oocyte, thus bypassing all natural barriers a sperm has to encounter. Usually used when there is a low sperm count or reduced sperm motility.

**Intra Uterine Insemination (IUI)** – Insertion of a prepared sperm sample into the uterus through the cervix.

**In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF)** – A procedure whereby an egg or eggs are recovered by laparoscopy or vaginal ultrasound aspiration. This can be a natural or stimulated cycle, when drugs are used to make the ovaries produce more eggs. They are then placed with a specially prepared sperm sample – partners or donors – so that fertilisation can take place. The pre-embryo(s) is/are then transferred to the uterus when it/they may implant and develop.

### How long does fertility treatment last?

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Below are some average timeframes for common fertility treatment options:

IUI	3-4 weeks
IVF	4-6 weeks.
ICSI	4-6 weeks

\* [www.hfea.gov.uk](http://www.hfea.gov.uk)

## Other support - where to go for help?

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- All QMUL staff can access **counselling** via Workplace Options, which is a free, confidential and independent service.  
Freephone: 0800 243 458 (username and password not required)  
Website: [www.workplaceoptions.co.uk](http://www.workplaceoptions.co.uk) (username: queenmary and password: employee).
- Remploy offers **counselling** for QMUL staff struggling with mental health issues (in this case applicable to anxiety/panic attacks/depression etc.)
- Website and forum containing information on infertility [www.fertilityfriends.co.uk/](http://www.fertilityfriends.co.uk/)

## Further information on infertility:

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- The **National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE)** fertility problems guidelines explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg156>
- The **NHS** provides an overview of infertility. You can find more at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/infertility/>
- Fertility Network UK, the UK's largest charity for people experiencing fertility problems <https://fertilitynetworkuk.org/>

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