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INTRACYTOPLASTIMIC SPERM INJECTION (ICSI)

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ICSI is a laboratory based procedure involving injecting a single sperm into an egg to achieve fertilisation during an IVF treatment cycle. It is used for men with a sub-optimal semen analysis or when there has been failed fertilisation in conventional IVF treatment.

In ICSI, the female partner undergoes IVF in the usual way. However, instead of inseminating eggs with a large number of prepared sperm, each egg is injected with a single sperm from the male partner's semen sample. A fine catheter is passed through the skin of the egg and sperm is injected into the cytoplasm. Following fertilisation, embryos are transferred to the uterus in the usual way.

In males who produce no sperm, it is sometimes possible to collect sperm using a sperm retrieval technique called PESA or TESE whereby sperm can be carefully prepared and ICSI carried out. Sperm retrieval combined with ICSI has helped many couples have a family of their own.

ICSI is also recommended for couples where there has been an unexplained failure to fertilise in routine IVF or where the fertilisation rate was very low in a previous treatment cycle. If the woman produces four or less eggs at egg collection, it is sometimes recommended that ICSI be carried out in order to maximise the chance of fertilisation.

There is thought to be an increased risk of fetal abnormality in cases of severe male factor treated by ICSI. The risk of abnormality remains small, although our understanding of this area is quite limited.