

The Royal Children's Hospital Fertility Preservation Service

Having Children after Cancer

Fertility preservation options for young women having cancer treatment

Why do I need to think about this now?

Coming to terms with a diagnosis of cancer can be a very difficult and emotional time. There are lots of important things to think about before your treatment starts.

One important question is whether the cancer treatments you receive now might affect your ability to have children in the future. This is called your **fertility**.

Having children may not be something you have thought a lot about up until now. You may not feel like thinking about it now. But it is important to try and keep your options open for the future.

Before your treatment for cancer starts it is important to know two things.

1. Is it likely that your cancer treatment might affect your ability to have children in the future?
2. Is there anything medically that can be done now to help look after your ability to have children in the future?

Who can help me decide the best thing to do at this point?

Not all cancer treatments affect fertility. It will be different for different people. It is important to talk to your cancer doctors about how your individual cancer treatment might affect your fertility.

Doctors will draw on a range of information to work out the likelihood that the treatment you have now will affect your chances of having children in the future. The full effects can only be known for sure after treatment has been completed, possibly not for several years.

Decisions about trying to preserve fertility usually need to be made as soon as possible because cancer treatment usually needs to start quickly. This can be stressful. Where possible your parents should be involved in these discussions and help with any decisions that are made.

Your health care team can refer you to other specialist fertility doctors outside the cancer clinic so you and your parents can have more detailed conversations about this topic.

Your health care team can also offer specialist counseling to help the decision-making process.

Good questions to ask

Now what: A young person's guide to dealing with cancer is a booklet produced by CanTeen. It suggests young people can find the following questions helpful when talking to doctors about this topic:

1. Is there a chance I will not be able to have children after this treatment?
2. Is there anything I can do to preserve my fertility?

3. How much time do I have before I start treatment?
4. Who can tell me more about my fertility options?
5. How do I know if I am fertile after treatment?

What options might be available to me?

Some fertility preservation options are considered standard and have already been shown to work in many people. Others are newer, and more experimental. How well they work may not be known until you are older and ready to have children. These are important things to consider during discussions and decision-making about what is the best option for you in this situation. Fertility preservation options that may be available for you include:

1. Collection of **eggs from your ovaries** before treatment begins, to freeze and store (after puberty, this is now considered a standard option in adults)
2. Collection of **tissue from your ovaries** (where your eggs are stored) before treatment begins, to freeze and store (experimental)
3. Surgery to move your ovaries out of the way of radiation treatment (it is standard to consider this when relevant, but successful results have been difficult to demonstrate)
4. Injections that try to protect the ovaries during treatment (experimental)

What are the next steps?

If further discussion and information about these options may be relevant to you:

1. Ask your doctor to make a referral for a Fertility Preservation Consultation using the contacts listed on the next page. (you can be seen the same day or within 48 hours if the situation is urgent)
2. You (and your parents) can also find more information in these resources:
 - a. Maybe later baby: A guide to fertility for young people with cancer
(Booklet produced by CanTeen, available from the health care team or the CanTeen website). Not all the detailed information in this booklet will apply to you. It would be good to discuss this booklet and what you read with a cancer doctor or a fertility preservation doctor.
 - b. "Can I Still Have Children?"
(Booklet produced by Reproductive Services Unit, The Women's/Melbourne IVF. Available from your health care team or by contacting Reproductive Services Unit RWH)

What about during and after cancer treatment?

Gynaecologists at department of paediatric and adolescent gynaecology are available to be consulted about fertility preservation options. They also provide advice during and after treatment about periods, relationships, fertility monitoring and other concerns that a young woman may have from diagnosis and into the future. They are happy to see young women and children after their treatment regardless of whether they chose to undergo fertility preservation or not.

Fertility preservation Audit and Registry

The Royal Children's Hospital is conducting an audit on fertility preservation measures being undertaken so that we can obtain more information about the long term outcome of these procedures and the experiences that young people and families have during and after these discussions. Your doctor will discuss this further and provide you with an information sheet. It is hoped that this will help health staff guide these discussions in a better way and help families in the future.

Contacts for referrals for a Fertility Preservation Consultation:

Oncofertility Coordinator

email: fertility@rch.org.au

Pager: 7047

Tel: (03) 9345 5896

The Department of Paediatric and Adolescent Gynaecology

Royal Children's Hospital

50 Flemington Rd

Parkville, Vic 3053

www.rch.org.au/rch_gynaecology/

Tel: **(03) 9345 5522** for urgent appointments, ask for the gynaecologist on call

Fax: (03) 9345 6180

Reproductive Services Unit

The Royal Women's Hospital,

2nd floor, cnr Grattan St & Flemington Rd

Parkville, Victoria 3052

Tel: (03) 8345 3200

Fax: (03) 8345 3260

Melbourne IVF

www.mivf.com.au

East Melbourne (03) 9473 4444

Box Hill (03) 9006 5500

Mt Waverley (03) 8805 7888

Monash IVF

www.monashivf.edu.au

Clayton (03) 9543 2833

Hawthorn (03) 9429 9188

For a full list of all fertility clinics www.varta.org.au