



Sperm Washing for Intrauterine Insemination (IUI)

What is Intrauterine Insemination?

Intrauterine insemination (IUI) is often the first type of fertility treatment attempted by couples and is a procedure that involves placing sperm inside a woman's uterus to facilitate fertilization. In order to get sperm ready for the IUI procedure, it must first be washed to ensure that only the healthiest sperm are used during the procedure.

What is Sperm Washing?

Sperm washing is a procedure used to prepare sperm for use in IUI. Semen that has not been washed cannot be inserted directly into a woman's uterus, because semen contains chemicals called prostaglandins. Prostaglandins cause muscular contractions and are responsible for cramps during menstruation and pregnancy. If semen is inserted directly into your uterus it could cause severe pain and cramping. Sperm is also washed in order to increase your chances of becoming pregnant. Sperm washing can remove dead sperm and those sperm with poor swimming ability (motility). The wash results in sperm that are more motile and more likely to fertilize your egg. Sperm washing can also get rid of the white blood cells, mucous and other debris in the semen which can interfere with fertilization.

Who Can Benefit from Sperm Washing and IUI?

This procedure is commonly used for infertility including patients with:

- unexplained infertility
- male-factor infertility
- women with endometriosis
- to enhance success with ovulation induction

Preparing for the Sperm Wash

It is relatively easy to prepare for the sperm wash procedure. The semen sample is collected in a cup after masturbation. Please note that some medications may also affect the quality of your sperm. Please speak with your fertility doctor if you are taking any medications.



Sperm Washing Procedure

Simple Sperm Wash

The simple sperm wash technique is the most basic way of washing and preparing sperm for IUI. Typically used for frozen donor sperm or patient samples with low counts and low motility, the semen is diluted in a test tube with a special solution of antibiotics and protein supplements. It is then placed in a centrifuge, a machine that spins around at extremely high speeds. As the sperm mixture is spun, sperm cells fall to the bottom of the test tube, producing a mass of dense, highly active sperm. These sperm can then be removed from the test tube and used in IUI. A simple sperm wash takes about 20 to 40 minutes.

Success Rates

Success rates do increase with sperm washing because it ensures that only the most active sperm are used for fertilization. However, success rates do depend on your partner's overall motile sperm count in addition to other factors. Typically, the lowest sperm count to be used with sperm washing is 1 million motile; however, success rates are significantly lower if your sperm count falls beneath 5-8 million motile. The optimal sperm counts for use with sperm washing are those over 10 million motile.

Cost of the Procedure

Sperm washes are not covered by British Columbia MSP. Please see The Olive Fertility Centre Kelowna's fee schedule for current pricing.