PREPARATION

Preparing for IVF: tests for both partners and how long it takes

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Which tests a woman and a man need before IVF, how long preparation for a cycle takes and what is worth changing three months before the start.

An IVF programme starts not with injections but with preparation. It decides when the cycle can begin, whether it will have to be postponed and how many good eggs and embryos can be obtained. The good news is that almost all of it is predictable, and some steps can be taken even before the first visit to a fertility specialist.

How long preparation for IVF takes

Usually one to three months pass between the first consultation and the start of stimulation. If the results are normal and the couple has already had some of the tests, the cycle can start with the next period. Preparation takes longer when something is found that is better corrected first: an infection, a uterine polyp, a thyroid problem or low semen analysis results.

For the man the benchmark is about three months: that is roughly how long sperm take to mature, so lifestyle changes show in the semen analysis only after a while.

The first consultation with a fertility specialist

At the first visit the doctor takes the couple’s history: how long they have been trying, any previous pregnancies, operations and chronic conditions, and what medicines are being taken now. Bring earlier test results and discharge summaries — it saves time and unnecessary tests. You leave with a test plan for your particular situation.

Tests for the woman before IVF

The basic list looks like this:

- blood group and Rh factor, a full blood count and a clotting screen
- hormones — AMH, FSH, LH, oestradiol (usually on days 2–5 of the cycle), TSH and prolactin
- infections — HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis
- a vaginal swab, a Pap test and PCR for sexually transmitted infections
- rubella antibodies — to leave time for vaccination if needed
- a pelvic ultrasound with an antral follicle count — together with AMH it shows the ovarian reserve
- a GP's confirmation that pregnancy is not contraindicated

What the AMH figures mean and why they are never read without age is covered in our article on AMH and ovarian reserve. Where indicated, the doctor may add a tubal patency test, a hysteroscopy, clotting tests or genetic testing.

Tests for the man

- a semen analysis — the main test; abstain from ejaculation for 2–7 days before it
- infections — HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis, blood group and Rh factor
- further tests if indicated — the MAR test, sperm DNA fragmentation, a consultation with an andrologist

How to read a semen analysis is explained in a separate article. The test can be done at the clinic — semen analysis prices and preparation.

Avoiding repeat tests

Some results are valid only for a limited time: HIV, hepatitis and syphilis tests, swabs and infection screens are usually wanted fresh, so they are done closer to the start of the cycle. Hormones and the ultrasound

are best done in the cycle your doctor names. Before going to the laboratory, check with your fertility specialist what you need and on which days of the cycle.

What to change three months before the cycle

- folic acid — daily for the woman, at a dose the doctor sets
- smoking and alcohol — both partners should stop
- weight — both excess and low weight reduce the chances; even a small correction matters
- for the man — avoid overheating (sauna, hot baths) and do not take testosterone or anabolic steroids without a doctor
- medicines and supplements — discuss everything you take regularly with your doctor

How preparation for the cycle goes

Once the tests are done, the doctor chooses the stimulation protocol and the start date. Stimulation most often begins on day 2–3 of the menstrual cycle, sometimes after a preparatory cycle on hormonal medicines. From there everything follows the stages described in our article “How IVF works”.

Frequently asked questions

Can IVF start straight after the first consultation? Sometimes, yes: if the couple comes with up-to-date results and the doctor sees no obstacles, the cycle can start with the next period.

Is preparation needed if the problem is only on the man’s side? Yes. The eggs come from the woman, so her tests and preparation are needed in any case.

How much does IVF cost? Prices for the stages of the programme and what the final cost depends on are on the IVF page of the Ekstramed clinic. You can book a consultation with a fertility specialist online.

This article is for information only and does not replace a consultation with a doctor. The list of tests and the timing of preparation are set individually by a fertility specialist.