LIPIODOL TUBAL FLUSHING IN THE TREATMENT OF UNEXPLAINED INFERTILITY

It was common, 50 years ago, for patients with infertility to have repeated tubal flushing in the treatment of their sub-fertility. For various reasons this fell from favour. I have recently been involved in some research that has revisited this area and I am sure there is something in it, and I would like to offer it routinely to patients who have unexplained infertility.

WHAT IS LIPIODOL?

Lipiodol is a sticky solution of iodine in poppy seed oil. It was the main fluid used at hysterosalpingogram (the test done in the X-Ray Department to see if your tubes are open or not) for many years.

WHO SHOULD CONSIDER HAVING THIS TREATMENT?

Women who have been trying to have a baby for 2 years or longer who have no obvious explanation for their difficulty in getting pregnant. In other words, they appear to be ovulating on the tests the doctor has organised, their tubes are normal, and their husband has normal sperm. The lipiodol probably works to improve the prospects of implantation of the fertilised embryo in the womb.

HOW IS THE TREATMENT PERFORMED?

I like to perform this in the X-Ray Department because of safety issues which I will describe later. Because of this, we can only do the test in the week after your period finishes. The timing is therefore difficult sometimes. When you come to the X-Ray Department we will pass a speculum into the vagina (like the nurse does to take a smear). We will put a small tube into the cervix (neck of the womb). When you are comfortable, we will then flush the Lipiodol through your womb into your tubes and take an x-ray to confirm it has got through. To make sure that the procedure is not too uncomfortable, we will warm up the Lipiodol before using it.

WHY DO I HAVE TO HAVE AN X-RAY?

We are not quite sure how Lipiodol works, but we do know that if it gets into your veins, it can make you unwell. It is rare to get the Lipiodol into the wrong place, but if it happened, the x-ray would pick it up straight away, and we would abandon the procedure. I have no personal experience of any major complications from this procedure but am aware that historically they were described.

WILL I HAVE PAIN DURING THE PROCEDURE?

We warm up the Lipiodol to ensure that you have as little discomfort as possible. Most ladies have some "period pain" but we will do our best to minimise this. You should be able to go home within an hour of having the procedure. You should be
able to go back to work the next day.

**WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF THE TREATMENT?**

My recent audit showed that 40% of patients had a baby conceiving soon after the treatment. The small studies that have been done have suggested that women who have this procedure have a doubling of the chances of being pregnant within four months of the treatment being performed. I will consider repeating the tubal flushing after six months if you have not conceived.

If you wish to discuss this treatment again, then I will happily see you again in clinic. In general, I perform this treatment myself and this is one of the reasons why there is sometimes a delay in getting your treatment sorted out. The advantage, however, is that I will be able to talk to you myself about any problems that you have with this information before you have the procedure.

Dr Andrew Watson
Consultant in Obstetrics & Gynaecology

Most recently updated 23.7.11
INSTRUCTIONS TO PATIENTS UNDERGOING LIPOIODOL TUBAL FLUSHING

I have seen you and discussed the option of having Lipiodol tubal flushing for your unexplained infertility. Please find enclosed an information sheet describing this treatment. If you require more information please, without hesitation, contact my Secretary and I will see you again and discuss this further with you.

We can't perform the Lipiodol tubal flushing, except in the week after you have finished your period. This is because we don't want to flush blood through your tubes (as in during your period). We need to perform an x-ray and we don't want to do this at a time when you might be pregnant (any time after day 12 of your cycle).

Please contact my Secretary on the first working day after your period starts, and hopefully she will be able to co-ordinate a time for you to come for the treatment.

With Best Wishes.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Watson
CONSULTANT OBSTETRICIAN/GYNAECOLOGIST

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