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SPECIAL REPORT from Dr. Bruce R. Gilbert

Viagra® and Male Fertility: Caution Advised

Great Neck, New York September 8, 2004 It is not uncommon for the male partner of an infertile couple to be unable to produce a semen specimen on the day of his partner's IVF procedure. This inability to produce a specimen "on demand" has been referred to as temporary, secondary or, my preference, situational erectile dysfunction. With time of the essence, and out-of-pocket costs often substantial, the inability to produce a specimen at the time of the scheduled IVF procedure often results in a request to the Urologist for urgent surgical sperm retrieval.



With the widespread availability of oral agents for treatment of sexual dysfunction, several investigators have used sildenafil citrate in men with situational erectile dysfunction. While it temporarily alleviated the dysfunction, Sildenafil and its metabolites were consistently found in semen.

Therefore, the potential effects of sildenafil citrate and its metabolites on sperm quality and function, on the female genital tract, as well as on fertilization, implantation and embryo development needs to be known before advocating use of this drug in couples attempting conception. Human studies are not consistent in demonstrating an effect of sildenafil on sperm motility. However, they do confirm significant concentrations of sildenafil in semen. Results from in vitro studies suggest a biphasic effect of sildenafil on sperm motility. At low concentrations of sildenafil, motility appears to be enhanced while at higher concentrations a decrease in sperm motility was observed. What is very interesting is the observed stimulating effects of sildenafil on the acrosome reaction, capacitation and zona pellucida binding, all important steps in fertilization. These findings certainly require further clinical investigation to identify what effects sildenafil might have on human reproduction.

The use of an oral agent for men with situational erectile dysfunction appears simple, effective and certainly less invasive than surgical retrieval. However, sildenafil citrate appears to affect more than just erectile function. Rigorous clinical studies are needed to demonstrate that its use does not adversely affect sperm quality or function. In addition, since sildenafil citrate is excreted in the semen, the effects of sildenafil on the female genital tract as well as on fertilization, implantation and embryo development must be known. Until the effects of sildenafil citrate on the various stages of sperm-oocyte interaction are understood, caution in its use in couples attempting conception is indicated.

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About Bruce R. Gilbert, M.D., Ph.D.

The practice is a multi-dimensional private Urology practice located in Great Neck on the North Shore of Long Island approximately 15 miles east of New York City.

The practice specializes in male fertility, male and female sexual function and medical acupuncture. On-site is a New York State licensed Andrology laboratory and Sperm Bank. We also have several ongoing Clinical Urology Research Studies.

Patient care is our primary concern. We are always available for questions or consultation. Our web site offers a wealth of information on many topics and is regularly updated with the latest medical data available.

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