

Endometrial ‘Scratch’ and IVF

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What is an ‘endometrial scratch’?

The ‘endometrium’ is the glandular lining of the uterus. This lining responds to hormones, and is the place where the embryo will implant and grow if pregnancy occurs. If pregnancy does not occur during the month, the endometrium will partially break down and this is the cause of a menstrual period.

Several years ago, it was suggested that injuring the endometrial lining of the uterus could increase that chance that a pregnancy will occur. Although the exact reason for this was unclear, some researchers felt that the injury and subsequent healing of the endometrium altered immune mechanisms or types of cell present, favouring pregnancy.

During the ‘scratch’ procedure, a fine catheter is passed through the cervix and an injury is created by either traumatising the endometrium, or taking a small sample (biopsy). Local anaesthetic is commonly used, but the procedure can be very uncomfortable.

Does a ‘scratch’ increase the chance of pregnancy?

Despite a large amount of interest in endometrial scratch, and the fact that this is a common procedure, there is only a small amount of high-quality research that addresses this question. When all of the available scientific studies were reviewed earlier this year* the reviewers found that the quality of the studies was low.

After studying all of the available research, their conclusion was:

“It remains unclear if endometrial scratching improves the chance of pregnancy for women undergoing [IVF] and, if so, for whom. This means that endometrial scratching should not be offered in daily practice until results from large and well-designed [studies]...become available.”

*van Hoogenhuijze *et al.* *Hum Reprod Open* 2019; doi: 10.1093/hropen/hoy025



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