

University's TV 'sperm race' helps to unlock mysteries of procreation

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University reproductive medicine expert [Dr Jackson Kirkman-Brown \(/staff/profiles/cem/RGD/kirkman-brown-jackson.aspx\)](/staff/profiles/cem/RGD/kirkman-brown-jackson.aspx) invited a group of male students to take part in an experimental 'Sperm Race' to explore what it takes to be the best out of millions in the BBC3 documentary How Sex Works.

Five obliging young men aged 19-25 rose to the challenge, providing samples which were 'raced' through an appropriate clinical medium at Dr Kirkman-Brown's state-of-the-art laboratories. After a nerve-wracking wait, the results were analysed over a friendly pint in the campus bar to show whose sperm has the best motility (swimming ability), whose were fastest and whose deposit contained the most!

The unusual experiment helps to illustrate the epic struggle that faces a solitary sperm that reaches the 'finishing line' in the third and final episode of the documentary, part of the Sex Season being featured on BBC3. The University research team were selected as international leaders in understanding how a human sperm is selected and swims through the female tract.

The series has explored the processes that culminate in procreation, the ultimate function of sex, observing what happens during key stages of sex from the physiological, neurological and psychological perspectives.

Dr Kirkman-Brown comments: 'Human sperm swim the equivalent distance of climbing Mount Everest through the female tract to reach the egg. The inability of an individual sperm to swim and find the egg is probably the largest, but least well-defined cause of fertility problems for the 20% of couples needing help to conceive. In the programme we demonstrate that it is this swimming ability as opposed to sperm count that matters. Through experiments like those in the program Birmingham research focuses on how to improve how sperm swim to help people conceive, but also to stop it as a novel contraceptive.'

The programme was aired on Monday 23 January 21.00-22.00 (GMT) on BBC Three.

The programme is available on the [BBC iPlayer \(http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01b5w18/How_Sex_Works_Making_It_Last/\)](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01b5w18/How_Sex_Works_Making_It_Last/) and will be shown again on BBC Three on;

- Tuesday 24 January 2012, 00.30 (GMT) BBC Three
- Wednesday 25 January 2012, 04.00 (GMT) BBC Three
- Friday 27 January 2012, 03.30 (GMT) BBC Three