



Vasectomy

- male sterilisation

A vasectomy is a minor operation that makes a man sterile. This means he can no longer father children.

Why do it?

Most men who want a vasectomy have completed their family. They decide they do not want to father more children.

Who does it?

A doctor does a vasectomy in the doctor's surgery or in day surgery at the local hospital.

What will happen?

Before the operation, the patient shaves his scrotum (ball bag).

The doctor -

- numbs a small area of skin on each side of the ball bag with local anaesthetic,
- makes a one centimetre cut in the skin,
- pulls out a short section of the tube (vas deferens) that allows the sperm to travel from the testicle (ball) to the penis, and removes a small piece.
- seals the ends of tube, and
- closes the skin with one or two stitches.

The doctor then repeats this procedure on the other side.

The patient should not lift heavy weights for two weeks after the operation. This helps prevent bruising. He can resume intercourse with his partner as soon as they wish.

The patient should avoid alcohol before and immediately after the operation, as this thins the blood and increases bruising.

How effective is it?

Sperm is still stored around

the base of the penis after the operation. The man must use this up before he is considered sterile. It usually takes about twenty ejaculations to be sure of sterility.

Between eight and 12 weeks after the operation, the man must have two sperm counts. A sperm count is a simple procedure where the man ejaculates into a small jar. The laboratory then examines it for any signs of sperm.

When two sperm counts show no sperm a man is considered sterile. After this, the chance of becoming pregnant is only one in 1000 per year. This compares with three in 1000 for female sterilisation, 10 in 1000 with the oral contraceptive pill, and more than this for condom usage.

Does it affect my sex life?

No. The male hormone testosterone is made in the balls. But unlike sperm, it is

carried through the body in the blood stream and not the vas deferens. In other words, there is no change in the male hormone level or sexual desire after a vasectomy.

The fluid ejaculated with sperm during sex comes from glands at the base of the penis. These glands are above where the cut is made during a vasectomy. After the operation, fluid is ejaculated as normal. The only difference is that it does not contain sperm, so is a slightly smaller quantity, and a clearer colour.

What are the complications?

Bruising of the ball bag is the most common problem. However, the patient usually goes back to work the next day, if heavy lifting is not involved in his job. A localised skin infection also occurs in up to 10 per cent of cases.

In the past, vasectomies were thought to be linked

with an increase of heart disease or cancer of the prostate. Most studies have shown no increase in cancer of the prostate, however, one study has shown a very slight increase.

Can it be reversed?

Reversing a vasectomy means rejoining the vas deferens. This operation does not always work. Vasectomy should be carried out only if a man is certain he does not want to father more children.

Vasectomy is a simple and permanent method of preventing unwanted pregnancy. Only a particular couple can decide whether male or female sterilisation suits them. Their doctor will need to explain the pros and cons of both procedures so they can make an informed choice.

