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VASECTOMY (Male Sterilization)

What is a Vasectomy?

A vasectomy is a sterilization technique for men. It requires minor surgery to cut the vasa deferentia, the tubes that carry sperm. This operation keeps sperm from mixing into the semen when men ejaculate. Without sperm, fertilization of an egg cannot occur and pregnancy is prevented. Vasectomies are usually done in a clinic or doctor's office and are much simpler procedures than female sterilization. Vasectomies are 99.9% effective as birth control. They do not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.

Procedure

During a vasectomy, local anesthesia is used. The doctor makes a small opening in the skin of the scrotum. This allows the sperm tubes or vasa deferentia to be seen and cut. The procedure itself takes about 15 minutes.

Men usually rest at the clinic after the procedure. When they return home, ice packs and painkillers can ease swelling and discomfort. It is recommended that men take 2 days off and perform only light activities for a week. For 2 days, it is helpful to wear scrotal supports and not bathe. It may take a week for men to feel comfortable resuming sexual activity.

Vasectomies are not effective right away. The sperm that were already in the tubes before the operation need to be ejaculated. This may take about a month or 10-30 ejaculations. Using other forms of birth control is important until follow-up tests can show two negative sperm counts.

Your Health

During surgery, it is common for men to feel faint. Bruising and swelling are normal and usually goes away within a few days to a week. However, men should report bleeding, pain, fever, or chills to their doctor.

Few long-term complications occur. Very rarely, the cut ends of the vas deferens rejoin and allow sperm to flow into the semen again. This can lead to an accidental pregnancy. Unprotected intercourse before two negative sperm counts can also lead to pregnancy.

Future Fertility

Vasectomy is a permanent sterilization technique. Reversal surgery is available, but not always effective. This procedure rejoins the cut ends of the vas deferens. In more than 70% of these cases, sperm can again be found in men's semen. However, pregnancy occurs less frequently. The earlier a reversal is performed, the better the rates are for restored fertility.

Sexuality

Men are able to fully enjoy sex after having a vasectomy. Hormonal levels and the feeling of orgasm stay the same. The amount of fluid men ejaculate does not noticeably change.

Advantages

- ◆ Permanent birth control.
- ◆ Allows sexual spontaneity.
- ◆ Requires no daily attention.
- ◆ Does not affect pleasure.
- ◆ Not messy.
- ◆ Less complicated than female sterilization.

Disadvantages

- ◆ Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS.
- ◆ Not immediately effective.
- ◆ Requires minor surgery in a clinic.
- ◆ Possible rejoining of the vas deferens.
- ◆ May not be reversible.
- ◆ Possible regret.

Deciding

Vasectomy is considered permanent sterilization. The decision to have it done should not be made lightly. Ask yourself: Would you change your mind if major changes in your life occurred, including a separation, or even the death of a partner or child? Consider as many possibilities as you can before making your decision. Know your options.

Testicular Self-Exam

One of the most common forms of cancer for men ages 15-34 is cancer of the testes. Men can protect themselves by performing monthly self-exams. A good time to do one is during a warm shower when the scrotal skin is relaxed. Place your fingers under each testicle and gently roll your thumb over the testicle. Feel for any hard lumps. If you find a lump, it may or may not be a problem. Make an appointment to see your doctor for a diagnosis. When testicular cancer is caught in its early stages, it can be effectively treated.

Further Resources

Vasectomy Information: www.vasectomy-information.com

American Cancer Society Resource Center:
www.cancer.org/cancerinfo

Cedar River Clinics: www.CedarRiverClinics.org

Contraception and Sex Information You Can Actually Use:
www.io.com/~wwwomen/contraception/

Our Bodies, Ourselves, Boston Women's Health Book Collective, new version in 2005.
www.ourbodiesourselves.org

Feminist Women's Health Center at www.FWHC.org and
www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info