
Contraception - vasectomy

Summary

- A vasectomy is an operation designed to sterilise a man by cutting the tubes that allow sperm to leave the testicles.
 - A man's sex drive, production of sex hormones and ability to reach orgasm are all unaffected.
 - Some men could consider storing sperm, just in case they change their mind in the future about having more children.
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Vasectomy is an operation that is done to sterilise a man. It is a permanent method of contraception that involves cutting and blocking the tubes in the groin (the vas deferens) that carry sperm from the testicles to the penis. The body then safely reabsorbs any sperm already inside the testicles over time.

After having a vasectomy, the chances of pregnancy are around one in 1,000. The operation does not affect a man's ability to produce male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm.

Structure of the penis and testicles

Male reproductive cells, or sperm, are made and stored inside the testicles. During orgasm, the muscles contract to push sperm from the testicles through tubes called the vas deferens. As sperm move through these tubes, fluid is added from structures called the seminal vesicles and the prostate gland.

This fluid, now called semen, is pushed into another tube called the urethra, which ends at the tip of the penis. Urine also leaves the body through the urethra. Muscles contract to push semen out of the urethra in small bursts, a process called ejaculation.

Vasectomy involves cutting the vas deferens and sometimes tying them off, stopping sperm from leaving the testicles. The body then safely reabsorbs any sperm already inside the testicles over time. Having a vasectomy does not affect a man's ability to make the male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm. When he ejaculates, the ejaculate will only contain seminal fluid.

Vasectomy technique

Usually, the operation is done under local anaesthetic, but some men choose general anaesthetic. The testicles are shaved and a small cut is made on either side of the scrotum. The surgeon then loops out each vas deferens.

The three different vasectomy techniques include:

- cutting and sometimes tying the vas deferens
- removing a small piece from each vas deferens
- sealing the vas deferens with heat using a diathermy machine.

What to expect after a vasectomy

The scrotum is usually bruised and tender after the operation. It is important to rest for a couple of days and avoid running, swimming or any other physical activity. Sex should also be avoided for a few days.

If the testicles become swollen or painful, or if the wounds start to weep, there may be an infection. Treatment options include antibiotics and dressings. Groin tenderness may last longer than a few days, but this is rare.

Failure rates of vasectomy

The chances of pregnancy after having a vasectomy are around one in 1,000. However, it can take some time for the body to safely reabsorb the sperm already inside the testicles. It is important to use another type of

contraception until tests show that there are no sperm. This usually takes three to four months, but can take up to six months.

Reversing a vasectomy

A man usually chooses to have a vasectomy after he and his partner have decided they do not want to have children or any more children. Often, when a man starts a new relationship, he will want to have a child with his new partner. Although in most cases it is possible to reverse a vasectomy, the procedure does not always work.

The chances of a reversal being successful depend on when and how the vasectomy was done. The longer the length of time since having the vasectomy, the less likely it is that sperm will function normally. Some surgeons recommend that a man has sperm stored at a sperm bank before having a vasectomy, just in case he changes his mind in the future about having more children.

Protection against STIs

It is important to practise safer sex, as well as to prevent an unintended pregnancy. Having a vasectomy does not give protection from sexually transmissible infections (STIs). The best way to lessen the risk of STIs is to use protection such as condoms. Condoms can be used for oral, vaginal and anal sex with other methods of contraception to help stop infections from spreading.

Where to get help

- You doctor
- Vasectomy clinic
- Dr Marie Tel. 1300 003 707
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. (03) 9257 0100 or freecall 1800 013 952

Things to remember

- A vasectomy is an operation that is done to sterilise a man by cutting the tubes that carry sperm from the testicles to the penis.
- Having a vasectomy does not affect a man's ability to make the male sex hormones, enjoy sex or reach orgasm.
- Some men choose to have sperm stored at a sperm bank, just in case they change their mind in the future about having more children.

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