

## Basic Facts

### *About a vasectomy*

*This handout gives information about vasectomy, a minor surgery that results in sterilization. It describes how the procedure is done and explains what to expect afterward.*

### What is a vasectomy?

A *vasectomy* is a minor surgery that results in male sterilization. The purpose of vasectomy is to stop sperm from entering the semen. This is done by blocking the *vasa deferentia* (the 2 tubes that sperm travel through from your testes to your urethra). As a result, the semen does not contain sperm, and pregnancy after intercourse does not occur.

### What happens during a vasectomy?

Vasectomy is done under *local anesthetic* (numbing medicine) in a hospital or doctor's office. You will be awake and alert, but the anesthetic will block pain. The surgery takes about 20 to 30 minutes. During a vasectomy:

- A small incision or puncture is made in the scrotum.
- The sperm duct, or *vas deferens*, on each side is cut.
- The ends of the *vas deferens* are closed with cauterly (burning), stitches, or metal clips. Then they are returned to the scrotum.
- The cut in the scrotum is closed with stitches that will dissolve on their own. Or, your doctor may use a method that does not use stitches.



*Please talk with your doctor if you have any questions or concerns about this procedure.*

### What are the benefits?

- A vasectomy is one of the safest and most effective forms of birth control. The surgery is simple, quick, and safe. Most men return to work and their regular activities fairly quickly.

- After a vasectomy, your testes will keep making sperm. But these sperm will disintegrate and will be absorbed into your body tissues. Your semen volume will stay the same as it was before.
- A vasectomy does not affect sexual activity, sensitivity of the penis, or male hormone production.
- Some men find that they enjoy sexual activity more after a vasectomy. They no longer have to fear an unwanted pregnancy and can often be more spontaneous.

## **Are there any long-term health problems after having a vasectomy?**

Vasectomy became popular as a form of permanent sterilization in the late 1950s. Some research studies since then have linked vasectomy with long-term health problems, including:

- Heart disease
- Prostate cancer
- *Frontal lobe dementia* (loss of brain function)

There is disagreement about the findings of these studies. In general, experts in urology agree that vasectomy is a very safe procedure. But, as with all surgeries, there are risks involved.

## **What should I expect after surgery?**

- After a vasectomy, there is usually only mild discomfort. Most men are able to return to work in 1 to 2 days.
- There may be some blood on the dressing (bandages). This is normal. You may also have some swelling around your incision. These symptoms should go away within 72 hours.
- You may have bruising around your scrotum and the base of your penis. This is not painful, lasts only a few days, and goes away on its own.
- Rarely (in less than 2% of patients, or less than 2 out of 100), a small blood vessel may escape into the scrotum and bleed and form a clot of blood. Your body will absorb a small clot over time. But, a large clot is painful. If a large clot forms, the area will probably need to be reopened and drained. You may need to stay in the hospital overnight and have general anesthesia if this occurs.
- To avoid complications, follow these instructions for 3 to 5 days:
  - Avoid all sex, including masturbation.
  - Avoid vigorous physical activities and any straddling activity that places pressure on the scrotum, such as bike riding.
  - Do not lift anything that weighs more than 10 pounds.

## How well does a vasectomy prevent pregnancy?

Vasectomy does not prevent pregnancy 100% of the time. Very rarely, the cut ends of the vasa deferentia rejoin. This occurs in about 1 of every 600 vasectomies.

Also, even though your vasa deferentia were cut, sperm can survive inside your body for several months. This means that if you want to avoid pregnancy, **you must use another form of birth control** until you have had a semen analysis that shows there are no more sperm in your ejaculate.

For this analysis, you must supply a semen specimen about 3½ months after your vasectomy. This specimen will be checked with a microscope to see if there are any sperm in it. For some men, it may take 6 months or longer after their vasectomy before there are no swimming sperm. You will need to wait until this follow-up exam shows you are sperm-free before you can safely have unprotected intercourse.

## Are there other birth control options?

Even though vasectomy can often be reversed through surgery, it should be considered a permanent form of contraception. It may not be the best means of birth control for everyone.

Other methods of birth control are:

- Aerosol contraceptive foam
- Cervical diaphragm
- Condoms
- Contraceptive creams or jellies
- Implantable contraceptives
- Injectable contraceptives
- Intrauterine device (IUD)
- Oral contraceptives
- Rhythm method
- Tubal ligation

## Can I save some of my sperm before a vasectomy?

If you are thinking about having a vasectomy, you may also want to consider saving some of your sperm with *cryopreservation* (freezing) or in a sperm bank. Please talk with your doctor about these options before your vasectomy.

## Questions for Your Doctor

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### Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or health care provider if you have questions or concerns.

Men's Health Center:  
206-598-6358

Weekdays from 8 a.m. to  
5 p.m.

After hours and on weekends  
or holidays, call this same  
number or go to the  
Emergency Room.

Find more information at:  
<http://depts.washington.edu/uroweb>