

What is it?

Sterilization is **permanent** birth control. That means it is not reversible. There are different sterilization procedures for men and women. Male sterilization is called **vasectomy**. Female sterilization is called **tubal ligation**, or having your tubes tied.

FACT: In the U.S., 1 out of 4 couples choose sterilization.

How Vasectomy Works

Vasectomy is a simple operation that is done in a clinic or health provider's office. During the operation, a health provider blocks the tubes that carry sperm from the testes (balls) to the penis. Once the tubes are blocked, sperm cannot get to the penis, or to woman's egg. This means that a man can enjoy sex **without** worrying about getting his partner pregnant.

How Tubal Ligation Works

Tubal ligation is a minor operation that is done in a clinic or hospital. During the operation, a health provider blocks the fallopian tubes (the tubes that carry a woman's egg to her womb or uterus). Once the tubes are blocked, the egg and sperm can't meet. This means that a woman can enjoy sex **without** fear of pregnancy.

Who Chooses Sterilization?

Men and women from all walks of life choose sterilization. Here are some of their reasons:

- They already have all the children they want
- They know they don't want children at all
- They want to enjoy sex without fear of pregnancy
- Pregnancy is risky for mother or baby because of health problems.

Vasectomy: What to Expect

Vasectomy is a simple operation that takes about 30 minutes. Here are the basics of what to expect:

- A local painkiller is injected into the skin of the scrotum (the sack that holds the balls).
- Your health provider will make a small opening in the skin of the scrotum. This allows your provider to reach the tubes and tie or seal them.
- You can go home the **same day** that you get the vasectomy.

After Your Vasectomy

It is normal to feel soreness, swelling, or bruising for a few days after the vasectomy. You can help yourself heal faster by following these simple steps:

- Rest for the first few days - avoid heavy lifting for at least 48 hours.
- Use ice packs on the scrotum for the first 24 hours after the operation. This will decrease bruising and help with swelling.
- Wear a jock strap to help with swelling.
- Wait until your cut is healed before you have sex.

Note: Vasectomy is **not** effective immediately. It takes about 12 weeks for sperm to clear from your tubes. You will need to get a test to find out for certain that your sperm count is zero. Use another method of birth control, like **condoms**, until you get your test.

"I finally decided to have a vasectomy and I am glad I did. No more worrying about my wife getting pregnant and best of all, no more condoms!"

**— Shawn, age 34
father of 3**

Tubal Ligation: What to Expect

Tubal ligation takes about 30 minutes. It does **not** remove any organs, and is not the same thing as a hysterectomy. Here are the basics of what to expect:

- You can get a tubal ligation right after childbirth or at any time during your menstrual cycle.
- Your provider will give you a general anesthetic so that you are asleep during the operation. Sometimes you have the option of a local anesthetic (you are awake, but feel no pain).
- Your health provider will make a small cut on the side of your belly button, or lower down on your abdomen. This allows your provider to reach the tubes and tie off, burn or seal them.
- You can usually go home the **same day** that you get the procedure.

Note: If you are worried about having an operation, you can ask your health provider about a new type of female sterilization called Essure. This method does not require any cutting and can be done while you are awake.

After Your Tubal Ligation

It is normal to feel some pain or soreness in your abdomen after the tubal ligation. Most women feel much better within a week if they follow these tips:

- Rest for the first few days
- Avoid heavy physical work for at least 1 week
- Wait to have sex until you feel comfortable

Note: A tubal ligation is effective **immediately**.

"I knew I didn't want any more kids, so I chose to get a tubal. I love the freedom from worry. I don't have to think about birth control anymore!"

**— Maria, age 31
mother of 2**

Benefits of Sterilization

- Safe, effective, permanent birth control
- Good option for men and women who do **not** want any more children
- Does not interrupt sex
- Does not change your ability to enjoy sex

Some Disadvantages: What You Should Know

- Sterilization is **permanent**. You need to be sure that you do not want any more children.
- Young people have more regret about sterilization—if you are **under 30**, it is important to be absolutely sure about your decision.
- Some men and women are afraid of having an operation, even if it is minor.
- Sterilization does **not** protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). You still need to use a **condom** if you think you need protection.

Risks: What You Should Know

Both vasectomy and tubal ligation are very safe operations. However, every operation has some risks. Risks from sterilization are **not common**, but it is important to know about them:

- For women, there is a risk of complication from the general anesthesia used in a tubal ligation.
- For women, if tubal ligation doesn't work and a woman gets pregnant, there is a higher chance that her pregnancy will be ectopic (in the tubes).
- For both men and women, there is a very small risk of infection after the operation.

Effectiveness

Vasectomy is over **99%** effective at preventing pregnancy. That means that out of 100 men less than 1 pregnancy will happen. Tubal ligation is a little less effective than vasectomy — about **98%**. That means that out of 100 women about 2 pregnancies will happen over a period of 10 years.

FACT: Sterilization is permanent birth control. Take time to be sure about your decision.

Vasectomy or Tubal Ligation?

One of the benefits of sterilization is that both men and women can choose to do it. Sometimes, couples have trouble deciding who is going to get the procedure—the man or the woman. The information below will help you to compare vasectomy and tubal ligation:

- Vasectomy is done in a health provider's office. Tubal ligation is usually done in a hospital.
- Vasectomy is done under local anesthetic. Tubal ligation is usually done under general anesthesia—but local anesthetic is sometimes an option.
- Recovery from vasectomy usually takes about 48 hours. Recovery from tubal ligation usually takes about one week.
- The failure rate for vasectomy is about 1%. The failure rate for tubal ligation is slightly higher at about 2%.

Common Questions

Will the operation hurt?

Most men feel some discomfort during a vasectomy — usually when the local anaesthetic (painkiller) is injected into their scrotum. During a tubal ligation, women are given an anesthetic so that they won't feel any pain during the operation.

Will sterilization change my hormones?

No! Sterilization does **not** change male or female hormones — the hormones that make you a man or a woman. If you are a man, you will continue to have erections, and you will still ejaculate (come). If you are a woman, you will continue to have your periods, just like before the operation.

Will sterilization change how I am sexually?

Sterilization will **not** change your sex drive! Both men and women are able to function sexually after sterilization. Most people find that they enjoy sex more, because they are no longer worried about pregnancy.

What if I change my mind in a few years? Is it reversible?

Both vasectomy and tubal ligation are permanent (non-reversible) birth control methods. Reversal is possible with both methods, but reversals are expensive, and their success rate is not high. Sterilization is a very personal and important decision. If you think you might change your mind later, sterilization may not be the best choice for you right now.

To learn more about reversible birth control methods:

Check out our brochures on:

The Pill
Depo Provera (“The Shot”)
Emergency Contraception (“EC”)
Condoms
The IUD
The Ring
The Patch

Check out our website at:

www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan

To find a Family Planning Provider near you:

Call the Family Planning Hotline
1-800-770-4334 **OR** TTY 1-800-848-5429
For confidential information and referrals

To prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, or after your birth control method fails:

Call the Emergency Contraception Hotline:
1-888-NOT-2-LATE (1-888-668-2528)
or check out the Emergency Contraception website:
www.not-2-late.com to find a clinic or pharmacy near you.



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