Having a vasectomy

This information sheet has been given to you to help answer some of the questions you may have about having a vasectomy. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives of the procedure as well as what you can expect when you come to hospital. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What is a vasectomy?
Vasectomy is a minor operation to sterilise a man permanently by disconnecting the tubes (known as the vas deferens) that carry sperm from the testicles to the penis.

The operation is usually performed using local anaesthetic to numb the area, so you will be awake during the procedure. However, you may be offered a general anaesthetic (so that you are asleep during the entire procedure) if your doctor feels this is appropriate.

What are the benefits – why should I have a vasectomy?
Vasectomy is a safe and effective form of contraception with a failure rate of less than one in 100.

Are there any other alternatives?
Vasectomy and condoms are currently the only methods of contraception available to men. Unlike condoms, vasectomy does not protect against sexually transmitted infections. Studies have shown however that one in 400 men deeply regret having a vasectomy six months after they had the operation.

If you have any doubt about being permanently sterilised you should not consider having a vasectomy.

What are the risks?
There are risks associated with any operation. Your doctor will explain the specific risks for a vasectomy to you before asking you to sign the consent form. Please ask questions if you are uncertain. Possible problems from a vasectomy include:

- **Mild bruising** at the site of the operation is common; it heals naturally and has no long-term complications.

- **Infection** is possible but rarely occurs and can usually be easily treated with simple antibiotics. Infection occurs in less than one in 100 men.
- For one in every 100 patients the operation is **not successful** and may need to be repeated. In addition there is a one in 2000 chance of the sperm carrying tubes rejoining naturally. If this happens it is usually within the first two months after the procedure. For this reason you will be advised to use other methods of contraception until you have had two negative semen tests (see the section **How will I know if the operation is successful?** on page 4).

- One in 50 men experiences long-term pain in the scrotum known as ‘post vasectomy pain syndrome’. This is not fully understood and can develop months or years after the surgery and may require further investigation or treatment. If it persists it is best managed surgically, up to and including removal of the painful testes (sperm producing glands).

- About 1 in every 100 patients having this procedure develop a haematoma or large bruise to the scrotum, which can make the scrotum swell alarmingly, sometimes to the size of a grapefruit. This is rare, but not surprisingly causes pain and distress. If a large haematoma develops, a second procedure may be required to evacuate the blood clot causing it. The swelling takes about a month to resolve.

- You may also have read that having a vasectomy can increase the risk of getting prostate cancer but there is no convincing evidence for this.

**What do I need to do before my surgery?**

It is important that you attend your preadmission appointment. This may be a “walk-in” appointment which takes place on the day of your outpatient appointment. Alternatively, you may be notified by post of the date of an appointment for around two to four weeks before your surgery. At this appointment we will assess your suitability for a general or local anaesthetic. If you do not attend this appointment, we may have to cancel your surgery. If you have children or care for an adult, please arrange for someone else to help you with this after your surgery. If you think this will be a problem, please contact us before your procedure.

It is important that you stop smoking for at least 24 hours before your operation to reduce the risk of chest problems. Smoking can also delay wound healing because it reduces the amount of oxygen that goes to the tissues. We have a no smoking policy in our hospitals. For your safety, we cannot allow you to leave the department to smoke while you are recovering from the operation. For more information on giving up smoking, please speak to your nurse or call the NHS Smoking Helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

**How can I prepare for a vasectomy?**

If you are having a general anaesthetic you will be required to have nothing to eat or drink for at least six hours before the procedure. We will give you clear instructions if you need to fast, including when to start fasting. Even if you are expecting to have your procedure under a local anaesthetic, please follow the fasting guidelines given if you are likely to require sedation (to help relax you). You should receive a copy of the **Having an anaesthetic** leaflet. Please ask for one if you have not received this.

You should bath or shower before coming to hospital but please do not shave the scrotum before your procedure as this can increase the risk of infection.

Wear tight brief type underpants on the day of the procedure, not boxer shorts.
If you are taking any antiplatelet medicines (such as aspirin or clopidogrel) or anticoagulant medicines (such as warfarin or rivaroxaban), then you may need to stop them temporarily before the procedure. If you have diabetes and you are having the procedure under general anaesthetic (which requires temporary fasting), then you may need to alter the dose of your diabetes medicines. Further information on stopping any medicines will be given to you when you come for pre-assessment. Please ask us if you have any questions.

**Giving my consent (permission)**

We want to involve you in all the decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This confirms that you agree to have the procedure and understand what it involves. You should receive the leaflet, *Helping you decide: our consent policy*, which gives you more information. If you do not, please ask us for one.

**What happens during the operation?**

A small cut is made in one side of the scrotum and the sperm tube is cut and the ends tied. One or two dissolvable stitches are used to close the incision. The same procedure is then repeated for the other side of the scrotum. In total the operation will take up to 30 to 45 minutes.

**Will I feel any pain?**

Vasectomy is not a painful procedure but you may feel some mild discomfort. If you have a local anaesthetic you will feel the discomfort of the needle going in followed by a brief stinging sensation as the local anaesthetic works for a few seconds before the area becomes numb. This can feel like a ‘bee sting’. After this you should not feel anything sharp or painful, but you will feel some sensations from the scrotum associated with moving the testicles.

The area may feel a little bruised but painkillers you can buy from your local chemist (such as paracetamol or ibuprofen) will be enough to relieve this. Always check that the painkillers will not react with any other medication you are taking and follow the instructions on the packet. Ask your pharmacist if you are unsure.

**What happens after the procedure?**

If you have the operation performed with local anaesthetic you will be able to go home after 60 minutes.

If you are having a general anaesthetic you will need approximately two hours to wake up fully before you can go home and you will need a responsible adult to accompany you home and stay with you overnight.

**What do I need to do after I go home?**

Immediately after the procedure you should rest for 24 hours and avoid any strenuous activity and heavy lifting for one week.

The wounds should be kept dry for 24 hours. You may then shower and dab the area dry. Do not have a bath for 48 hours and avoid swimming for one week.

All stitches used are dissolvable but can take up to four weeks to disappear.
You can have sex when you feel comfortable but we recommend waiting a couple of days for the wounds to heal. Remember you must use another method of contraception until you are informed that the operation has been successful.

**How will I know if the operation has been successful?**

You will not be sterile straight away as there will still be some sperm left in the tubes. For this reason you will be asked to provide two semen analysis tests at 12 and 14 weeks after the procedure. Only two clear results will confirm whether the operation has been successful. You should obtain the results from your GP or contact our department for the results of these two tests one week after dropping off the second sample.

If you do not have clear semen tests at 12 and 14 weeks, you may be asked to provide further specimens after 12 weeks and a certain number of ejaculations to allow the tubes to clear of sperm. You must continue to use an alternative form of contraception until you have been given the all clear.

**When can I return to work?**

Every patient reacts differently to anaesthetic and there is no definite rule as to when you should return to work. Most people take a week off work, although this will depend on your recovery and the type of work that you do. If you work in an office, you should take at least two to three days off after your operation. If your job involves manual labour, please do not work for a week after your operation. Have some rest to help you heal and to let the anaesthetic wear off properly. Please do not return to work until you feel ready to do so.

Please do not play any sports for two weeks after the operation. Your GP can give you a medical certificate (Med3) if needed. If your GP does not receive your discharge letter in the post, please get them to contact the department.

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**Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about your vasectomy, please telephone the urology ward where you were treated:

- **Florence Ward** on 020 7188 8818
- **Aston Key Ward** on 020 7188 8860

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**Pharmacy Medicines Helpline**

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

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**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust’s services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

e: 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas’ t: 020 7188 8803 at Guy’s e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk

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