Information for women considering sterilisation at the time of caesarean section

The aim of this information sheet is to help answer some of the questions you may have if you are considering sterilisation at the time of caesarean section. 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 sterilisation at the time of caesarean section?
Sterilisation is a permanent way of preventing pregnancy. It usually involves having an operation.

The method used for women is called a tubal ligation. This is an operation which cuts and ties the fallopian tubes. This means that your eggs can no longer be fertilised by your partner’s sperm through sexual intercourse. The egg dissolves inside you and your periods occur as usual. This operation may be done during caesarean section.

What are the benefits of sterilisation at the time of caesarean section?
You may be considering sterilisation at the time of caesarean section if:

- you have decided that you do not want more children; and
- you wish to use a permanent method of contraception.
How well does sterilisation work?
Sterilisation does not work if the tubes that have been cut or blocked as part of the operation join up later on. You can get pregnant immediately or at any time (even several years) after a failed operation.

The risk of pregnancy after sterilisation by tubal ligation is about 1:200, meaning that one in every 200 women who undergo sterilisation may get pregnant at some point after sterilisation. There is less chance of a pregnancy after a vasectomy than after a tubal ligation (for more information see the Are there any other alternatives section later in this leaflet?).

Sterilisation done at the time of caesarean section may also have a lesser chance of success than sterilisation done later because of the changes the uterus and tubes undergo during pregnancy.

What are the risks?
Research has shown that if you decide to have a sterilisation procedure during pregnancy or delivery, you may regret it later.

Also, if you get pregnant after sterilisation by tubal ligation there is a chance that the pregnancy will develop in the fallopian tube rather than in the womb. This is called an ectopic pregnancy. This means that if you miss your periods after you have been sterilised, you may be pregnant and you need to see your doctor urgently.

- There is no evidence that having a tubal ligation causes problems that would mean you need a hysterectomy later in your life.
- There is no evidence that having a tubal ligation affects your sex drive.
- Research shows that if you are over 30 years old when you have a tubal ligation, it is not linked to getting heavier or irregular periods. There is little evidence about how having a tubal ligation affects your periods if you have the operation when you are under 30.

It is best to give yourself time to think about what you want to do – don’t rush into anything. If you do decide you want a tubal ligation at the same time as a caesarean, your doctor or nurse should make sure that you have been given counselling and that you make the decision at least a week before your caesarean.

Can it be reversed?
All sterilisation operations are meant to be permanent. The chances of a reversal being successful are generally low. There is no guarantee of success and you will usually have to pay to try to have the operation reversed.

What happens first?
The doctor should tell you more about what the operation involves before you make a final decision. You should have a chance to talk about the operation in detail, to raise any questions or worries you may have and to think about what it will mean for you.
Are there any other alternatives?

If you are a couple you need to consider both tubal ligation (for women) and vasectomy (for men).

Vasectomy is usually done under local anaesthesia (a medicine that ‘freezes’ a specific part of the body). Partners of men who have had a vasectomy are 10 times less likely to become pregnant than woman who have had tubal ligation.

Ejaculation will be possible but semen will no longer contain sperm, so you cannot become pregnant. The sperm in the testicles are naturally reabsorbed back into the body and do not build up.

If you are in a long-term relationship you need to consider both methods and decide which one is best for you as a couple.

Your doctor, midwife or nurse will also tell you about other long-term methods that women can use to avoid getting pregnant. These include:

- **Copper IUDs (intrauterine device or “coil”)** - the intrauterine device (“IUD”) is put into your womb and can safely stay there for up to eight years. If you are over 40 when it is fitted, it can be left in until you reach the menopause. This can be fitted 6 weeks after your delivery in the local family planning clinic or by your GP.

- **A progestogen IUS (intrauterine system)** - this is a hormone-releasing IUD which lasts for five years and is called a Mirena system. The Mirena system is as effective as vasectomy and more effective than tubal ligation. It is also reversible. Please ask to see our leaflet about Mirena.

- **Progestogen implant** – this uses a small flexible tube inserted under the skin of the arm to release the hormone progestogen. The implant lasts for three years. This method is more effective than tubal ligation and is reversible.

The main advantage of these methods is that they can be reversed. Like tubal ligation and vasectomy, they all have risks and benefits. Your doctor or nurse can tell you more about them.

Asking for your consent

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 have received the leaflet, Helping you decide: our consent policy, which gives you more information. If you are not given a copy of this leaflet, please ask us for one.

What happens during the procedure?

If you have a tubal ligation at the same time as a caesarean, the tubes will usually be cut and tied. Having tubal ligation at the same time as a caesarean doesn’t make your caesarean any more risky. For more information on the risks of caesarean section please talk to the nurse or doctor caring for you, and ask us for a leaflet.
What happens after the procedure?

After the procedure you will receive the same care as other women who have had a caesarean. For more information on what happens after a caesarean and what to do when you go home, please ask us for a leaflet.

You should contact your GP as soon as possible if:

- you miss your period or you think you might be pregnant; or
- you have sudden or unusual pain in your abdomen; or
- you have any unusual vaginal bleeding; or
- you have a light or delayed period.

Will I have a follow-up appointment?

You will have the usual post-natal follow up appointments, although you will not have a separate follow-up appointment for the sterilisation procedure.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about sterilisation performed at the same time as caesarean section, please do not hesitate to call the maternity helpline on 020 7188 8760 (Monday to Friday, 8.30am to 4pm).

Useful sources of information

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:

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

Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)
For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas’ Hospital.

| t: 020 7188 3416 |

Language support services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

| t: 020 7188 8815 | fax: 020 7188 5953 |

NHS Direct
Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

| t: 0845 4647 | w: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk |

NHS Choices
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

| w: www.nhs.uk |