

IS A VASECTOMY RIGHT FOR YOU?

Vasectomy is a simple, safe procedure that makes a man unable to father a child (sterile). It is the most effective birth control method for men. There are many good reasons you might choose to have a vasectomy. But it is a serious step. So you and your partner should understand all the facts and share in the decision.



Choosing vasectomy is a decision you should share with your partner.



A PERMANENT DECISION

Having a vasectomy should be considered a permanent decision. Before you make this choice, you must be sure it's what you want. Many men choose vasectomy because their families are already complete. Others, because it's more reliable than other birth control methods. No matter the reason you're considering a vasectomy, there are important questions you should ask yourself. Is there any circumstance that might make you change your mind? For instance, if you entered a new relationship, would you want more children? If you decide to have a vasectomy, you should have no doubts about these issues.

FACT: A vasectomy does not affect your ability to have sex.

A vasectomy doesn't affect your ability to have erections or orgasms. You'll still be able to enjoy sex. It also doesn't visibly change your semen.

FACT: A vasectomy does not cause health problems.

You may have heard that a vasectomy causes health problems such as prostate cancer or heart disease. Recent medical studies say this is not true. Keep in mind, though, that having a vasectomy will not protect you against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

FACT: A vasectomy does not reduce your sex drive.

After a vasectomy, your male hormone levels remain the same. This means your sex drive, hair distribution, and the pitch of your voice won't change.

FACT: A vasectomy will not solve relationship problems.

The only part of your life a vasectomy changes is your ability to father a child. Vasectomy is not a solution for sexual or relationship problems. It's also not a decision to make during times of stress.

THE MALE REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM

For pregnancy to occur, a man's sperm (male reproductive cells) must join with a woman's egg.

To understand how a vasectomy works, you need to know how sperm are produced, stored, and released by the body.

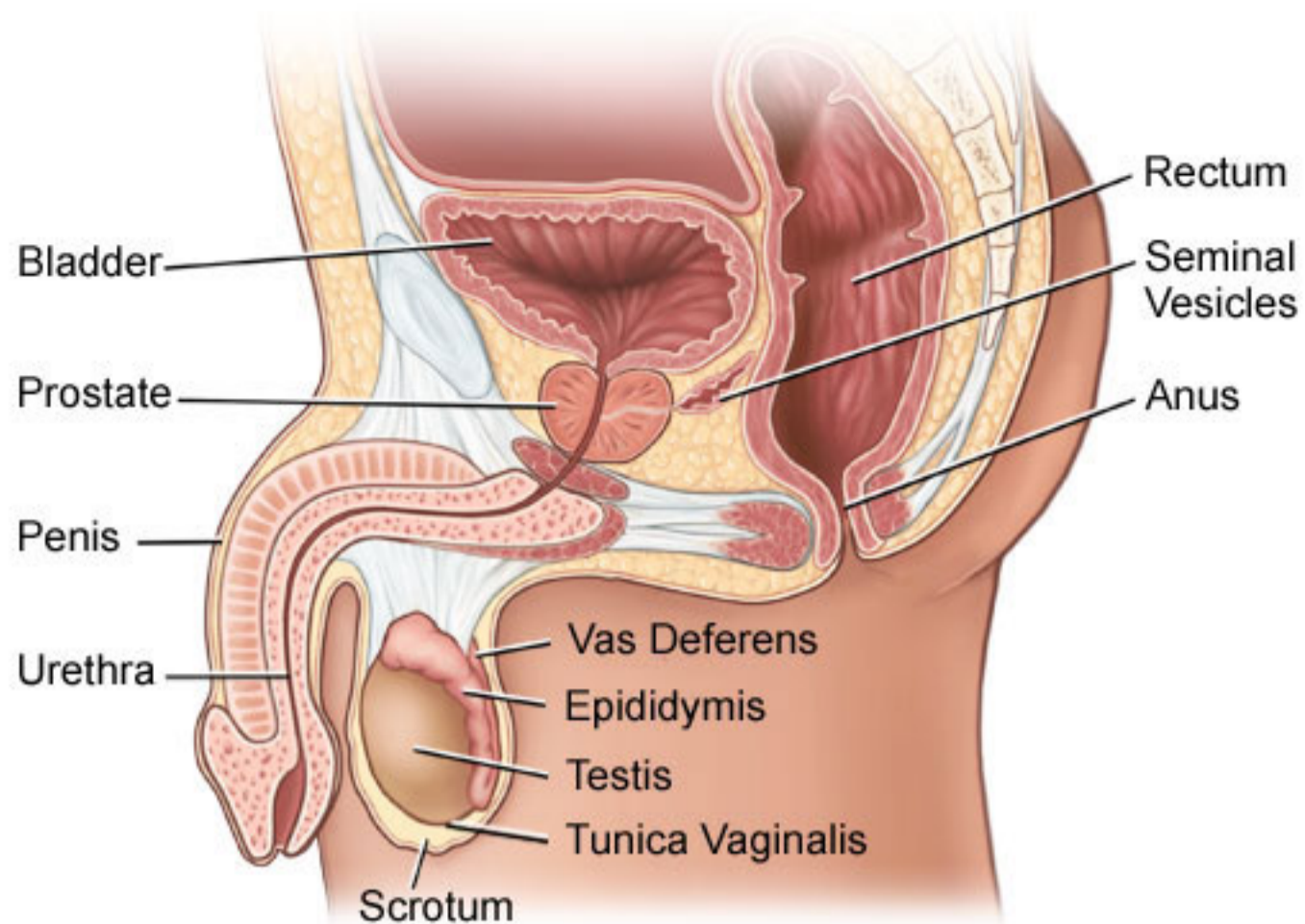
The **urethra** is the tube in the center of the penis. It transports both urine and semen. When you have an orgasm, semen is ejaculated out of the urethra.

The **seminal vesicles** and the prostate gland secrete fluids called semen. This sticky, white fluid helps nourish sperm and carry them along.

The **epididymis** is a coiled tube that holds the sperm while they mature.

The **scrotum** is a pouch of skin that contains the testes.

Male Reproductive Tract

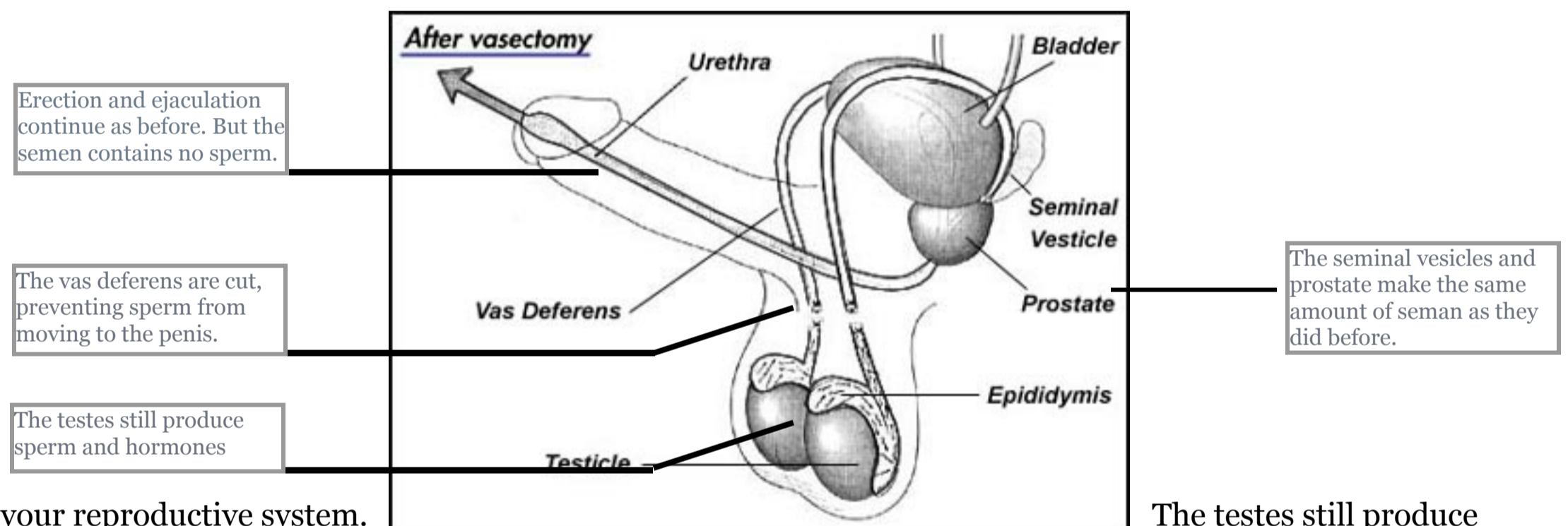


The **testes** are glands that produce sperm and male hormones.

The **vas deferens** are tubes that carry the sperm from the epididymis to the penis.

How a Vasectomy Works

During surgery, the two vas deferens are cut and sealed off. This prevents sperm from being able to travel from the testes to the penis.



It is the only change in your reproductive system. The testes still produce sperm. But since the sperm have nowhere to go, they die and are absorbed by your body. Only a very small amount of semen is made up of sperm. So after a vasectomy, your semen won't look or feel any different.

KEEP IN MIND: After a vasectomy, some active sperm still remain in the reproductive system. It will take time and numerous ejaculations before the semen is completely free of sperm. Until then, you'll need to use another form of birth control.

THE VASECTOMY PROCEDURE

Vasectomy is an outpatient (same day) procedure. It can be done in a doctor's office, clinic, or hospital. Your doctor will talk with you about preparing for surgery. He or she will also discuss the possible risks and complications with you. After the procedure, follow all your doctor's advice for recovery.

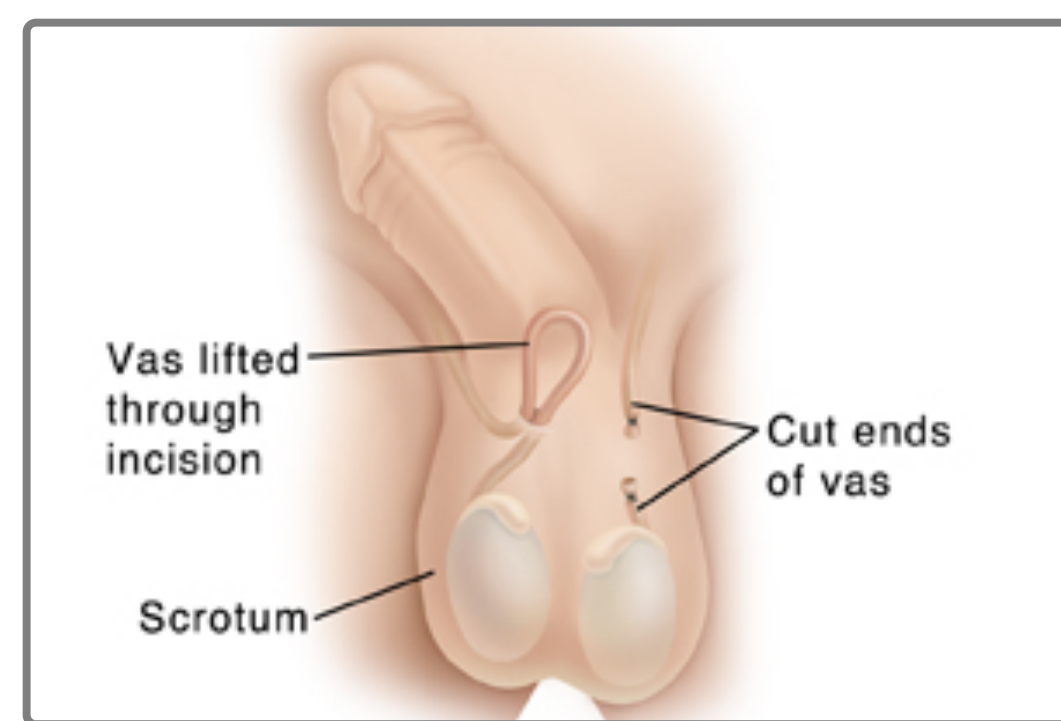
Preparing for Surgery

Your doctor will talk with you about getting ready for surgery. You may be asked to do the following:

- Sign a consent form. This must be done at least a few days before surgery. It gives your doctor permission to do the procedure. It also states that a vasectomy is not guaranteed to make you sterile.
- Don't take aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen for 2 weeks before surgery. These medications can cause bleeding after the procedure. Also, tell your doctor if you take any medications, supplements, or herbal remedies.
- Tell your doctor if you've had any prior scrotal surgery.
- Arrange for an adult family member or friend to give you a ride home after surgery.
- Shower and clean your scrotum the day of surgery. Your doctor may also ask you to shave your scrotum.
- Bring an athletic supporter (jock strap) or pair of snug cotton briefs to the doctor's office or hospital.
- Eat no more than a light snack before surgery.

During Surgery

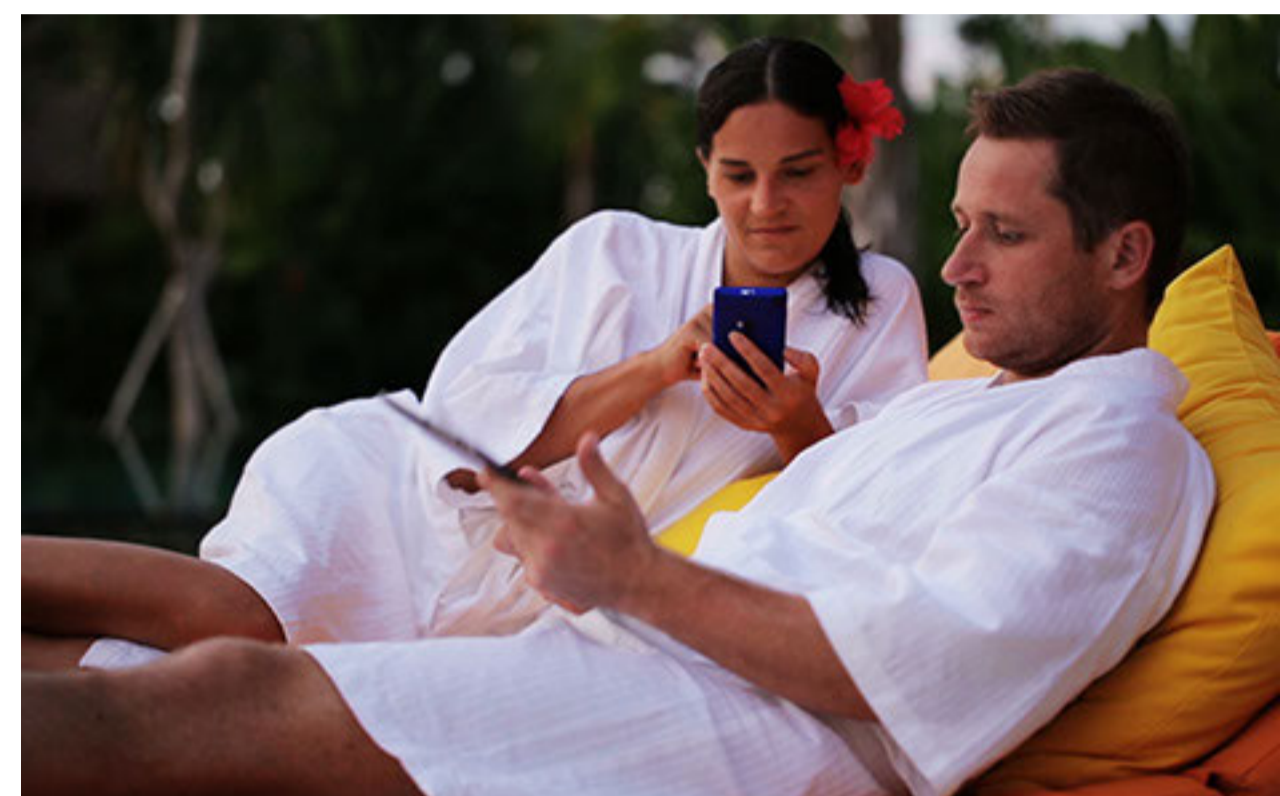
You'll be asked to undress and lie on a table. You may be given medication to help you relax. To prevent pain during surgery, you'll be given an injection of local anesthetic in your scrotum or lower groin. Once the area is numb one or two small incisions are made in the scrotum. This may be done with a scalpel or with a pointed clamp (no-scalpel method). The vas deferens are lifted through the incision and cut. The ends of the vas are then sealed off using one of several methods. If needed, the incision is closed with stitches. The entire procedure usually lasts less than 30 minutes. Once it's over, you can rest for a while until you're ready to go home.



Recovering at Home

For about a week, your scrotum may look bruised and slightly swollen. You may also have a small amount of bloody discharge from the incision. This is normal. To help make your recovery more comfortable, follow the tips below.

- Stay off your feet as much as possible for the first 2 days. Try to lie flat on a bed or sofa.
- Wear an athletic supporter or snug cotton briefs for support.
- Reduce swelling by placing an ice pack or bag of frozen peas in a thin towel. Then place the towel on your scrotum.
- Take medications with acetaminophen (such as Tylenol) to relieve any discomfort. Don't use aspirin, ibuprofen, or naproxen.
- Ask your doctor how long to wait before bathing. This is usually 48 hours. You should also ask your doctor when it's okay to go back to work.
- Avoid heavy lifting or exercise for a week.
- Ask your doctor how long to wait before having sex again. Remember: You must use another form of birth control until you're completely sterile.



To avoid complications, be sure to take it easy for the first few days after surgery.

POSSIBLE RISKS AND COMPLICATIONS

Vasectomy is a safe procedure. But it does have risks, including bleeding and infection. You may also have any of the following after surgery:

- Sperm granuloma is a small, harmless lump that may form where the vas deferens is sealed off.
- Sperm buildup (congestion) may cause soreness in the testes. Anti-inflammatory medications can provide relief.
- Epididymitis is inflammation that may cause scrotal aching. This often goes away without treatment. Anti-inflammatory medications can provide relief.
- The vas deferens can reconnect in rare cases. This makes you fertile again and can result in an unwanted pregnancy.
- Sperm antibodies are a common response of the body to absorbed sperm. The antibodies can make you sterile, even if you later try to reverse your vasectomy.
- Long-term testicular discomfort may occur after surgery, but is very rare.

WHEN TO CALL YOUR DOCTOR

Call your doctor if you notice any of the following after surgery:

- Increasing pain or swelling in your scrotum
- A large black-and-blue area, or a growing lump
- Fever or chills
- Increasing redness or drainage of the incision
- Trouble urinating

SEX AFTER A VASECTOMY

A vasectomy doesn't change your sexual function. So when you start having sex again, it should feel the same as before. A vasectomy also shouldn't affect your relationship with your partner. It's important to remember, though, that you won't become sterile right away. It will take time before you can have sex without the need for birth control.

UNTIL YOU'RE STERILE

After a vasectomy, some active sperm still remain in your semen. It will take time and many ejaculations before the sperm are completely gone. During this period, you must use another birth control method to prevent pregnancy. To make sure no sperm are left in your semen, you'll need to have one or more semen exams. You usually collect a semen sample at home and bring it to a lab. The sample is then checked under a microscope. You're sterile only when these samples show no evidence of sperm. Ask your doctor whether additional follow-up is needed.

AFTER YOU'RE STERILE

After your doctor tells you you're sterile, you no longer need to use any form of birth control. You're free to have sex without the fear of unwanted pregnancy. However, a vasectomy does not protect you from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). If you have more than one sex partner, be sure to practice safer sex by using condoms.

Until your doctor says you're sterile, you must use another form of birth control such as condoms.



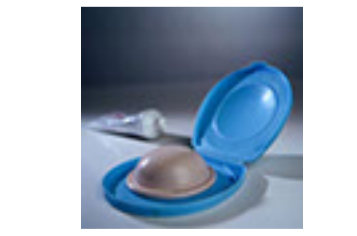




IF YOU CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT HAVING CHILDREN

A vasectomy must be considered permanent. But a change in your life may make you want to have children, or more children. In this case, a procedure called vasovasostomy might restore fertility. During the procedure, the cut ends of the vas deferens are reconnected to allow the free flow of sperm. However, having a vasovasostomy does not guarantee you'll be able to father a child. The procedure is also expensive and not often covered by insurance. As an alternative, sperm banks can freeze your sperm before you have a vasectomy. The sperm are then stored in case you decide to have a child. Be aware, though, that achieving pregnancy with stored sperm is also costly and uncertain.

Other Birth Control Methods

Before deciding on a vasectomy, you and your partner should consider other methods of birth control. Keep in mind that some methods are more effective than others. And all of these methods (except for tubal ligation) are effective only when used correctly. Ask your doctor for more information.

	Birth Control Pills or Patches	How Used	Things to Consider
		Birth control pills or patches contain hormones that prevent a woman's ovaries from producing eggs. Pills are taken daily. The patch is worn on the skin for a week at a time.	When used properly, both pills and the patch are highly effective. A prescription is required and side effects are possible.
	A Condom	A condom is a thin sheath that fits over the penis during sexual intercourse. It blocks semen from entering the vagina. There are also female condoms that fit into the vagina.	When used properly, condoms are an effective birth control method. Latex condoms can also help prevent the transmission of many STDs.
	Diaphragm or Cervical Cap	A diaphragm is a small, thin rubber cup. The cervical cap is similar, but smaller. Either one is placed over the opening of the uterus to keep sperm out.	Both the diaphragm and the cervical cap should be used with spermicide to increase their effectiveness. A prescription is required.
	Female Sterilization (Tubal Ligation)	Tubal ligation is a surgical procedure that blocks a woman's fallopian tubes. This prevents eggs from being able to join with sperm.	Like a vasectomy, this method should be considered permanent. However, the procedure is more complicated and expensive than a vasectomy.
	Hormone Injections	Hormones may be injected every 3 months to prevent a woman from producing eggs.	Regular injections are necessary to maintain effectiveness. A prescription is required. Side effects are possible.



IUD (Intrauterine Device)

An IUD is a small device that is placed into the uterus to prevent sperm from fertilizing an egg.

An IUD requires a prescription and must be placed into the uterus by a doctor. Side effects are possible.



Natural Family Planning (Rhythm Method)

This method requires abstaining from sex during a woman's fertile period. This period usually lasts from 5 to 15 days during each menstrual cycle.

This method is not as effective as many other birth control methods. To learn more, talk with your healthcare provider.



Spermicides

Spermicides are chemical foams, creams, films, or jellies that kill sperm. They are placed in the vagina and often used with other forms of birth control.

Used alone, spermicides are not as effective as many other birth control methods. Allergic reaction to the spermicides is possible.

When The Time Is Right



Choosing to have a vasectomy is a serious decision. But once you've decided the time is right, you and your partner can enjoy newfound freedom in your sex life. If you already have children, you can also feel comfortable knowing your family won't grow larger unexpectedly.