



Female Sterilization

What is a Female Sterilization?

There are two common types: Tubal Ligation is a one-time outpatient surgery to cut or tie the fallopian tubes. The other options involve the placement of a tiny device into the fallopian tubes around which scar tissue grows and after about three months the tubes are blocked (Essure or Adiana).

Tubal Ligation, commonly called “getting your tubes tied,” is a surgical sterilization technique for women. This procedure closes the fallopian tubes and stops the egg soon after ovulation as it travels through the fallopian tubes toward the uterus from the ovary. It prevents sperm from reaching the fallopian tube to fertilize an egg. In a tubal ligation, fallopian tubes are cut, burned, or blocked with rings, bands or clips. The surgery is effective immediately. Sterilization does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS. With Essure and Adiana, a follow up test is required after three months to determine if the tubes are blocked. A backup birth control method is necessary until the test results show that the tubes are completely blocked. Sterilization has a very low failure rate.

Procedure

Tubal ligation is a relatively simple out-patient surgery done in a clinic, doctor's office, or hospital. It can be performed under local or general anesthesia. Mini-laparotomies and laparoscopies are the two most common techniques for female sterilization. Other procedures include laparotomy, culpotomy, culdoscopy, hysteroscopy, and hysterectomy. Each procedure carries different risks and benefits. Be sure the clinic discusses surgical options with you, describes the risks, and answers all of your questions before the surgery.

In the laparoscopy procedure, the abdomen is filled with carbon dioxide gas so that the abdominal wall balloons away from the uterus and tubes. The surgeon makes a small cut just below the navel and inserts a laparoscope, a small telescope-like instrument. A second incision is made just above the pubic hairline to allow the entrance of the instrument that will cut, sew or burn the tubes. The surgery takes about half an hour.

There may be up to several months delay between your request for surgery and the day it is performed. You may want to consider other birth control methods in the meantime. Young women with no children may have difficulty finding a surgeon to perform the procedure.

After surgery, it is recommended that women take 2 to 3 days off and only perform light activities for a week. Sexual activity can start again when a woman feels comfortable, usually after a week. Women who have surgery performed through their vagina are advised not to put anything into their vagina for 2 weeks to avoid infection.

With Essure and Adiana, the insertion of the device into fallopian tube is usually done at a clinic. Then, a woman must wait about three months before she can be tested in a hospital to see if the tubes are blocked. During the three months, another method of birth control is necessary.

Your Health

Although pregnancy is unlikely, there is a slightly higher risk of ectopic pregnancy after a tubal ligation. An ectopic pregnancy occurs when a fertilized egg attaches and grows outside the uterus. This can be very dangerous and requires immediate medical attention. It is very important to contact a doctor or hospital immediately if you suspect you are pregnant after having a tubal ligation or Essure or Adiana.

Abnormal bleeding and bladder infections are risks after tubal ligations. Each type of surgery also involves different risks.

Some women report having post-tubal sterilization syndrome. The symptoms include irregular and painful periods, mid-cycle bleeding, or no periods. While some physicians believe there is no evidence that this syndrome exists, others believe more research should be done.

Women who have tubal ligation reversal surgery and become pregnant have a higher chance of ectopic pregnancy. Adiana and Essure are not reversed.

Future Fertility

Sterilization is considered a permanent method of birth control. Surgery to reverse a tubal ligation, Essure or Adiana is not common and probably not effective. In addition, reversals are difficult and expensive.

Sexuality

Women are fully able to enjoy sex after a tubal ligation. Usually, hormone levels and a woman's menstrual cycle are not noticeably changed by sterilization. Ovaries continue to release eggs, but they stop in the tubes and are reabsorbed by the body. Some women experience improved sexual pleasure because they are less worried about becoming pregnant.

Advantages

- ◆ Permanent birth control
- ◆ Immediately effective
- ◆ Allows sexual spontaneity
- ◆ Requires no daily attention
- ◆ Not messy
- ◆ Cost-effective in the long run

Disadvantages

- ◆ Does not protect against sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS
- ◆ Requires surgery
- ◆ Has risks associated with surgery
- ◆ More complicated than male sterilization
- ◆ May not be reversible
- ◆ Possible feelings of regret

Deciding

Tubal ligation, Adiana and Essure are considered permanent sterilization. The decision to have it done should not be made lightly. Ask yourself: would you change your mind if major changes in your life occurred, including a separation, or even the death of a partner or child? Consider as many possibilities as you can before making your decision. Know your options.

History of Abuse

Sterilization has a long history of abuse in the United States and around the world. It was once common to perform sterilizations on all handicapped women. In the past, many poor women and women of color were refused medical care unless they agreed to be sterilized. Sterilization has often been proposed as a solution to poverty. **Forced or coerced sterilization is a violation of human rights.**

Emergency Contraception

You can prevent pregnancy *after* sexual intercourse by taking Emergency Contraception pills (Plan B). Plan B works by giving the body a short burst of synthetic hormones that disrupt the hormone patterns needed for a pregnancy to start. Emergency Contraception is most effective in the first 24-48 hours after unprotected intercourse, but it can work for several days.

To find Emergency Contraception, see this website: ec.princeton.edu. If you already have birth control pills in your possession, this website explains how to use them as emergency contraception.

In Washington State, you can get Plan B directly from your pharmacy. Call ahead to make sure they have it in stock. Some women are buying Plan B in advance (it costs around \$35-50) so they will have it on hand if they need it.

Further Resources

- ◆ *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Boston Women's Health Book Collective, www.ourbodiesourselves.org
- ◆ Avert HIV and AIDS, www.avert.org
- ◆ *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, www.ourbodiesourselves.org
- ◆ Feminist Women's Health Center, www.FWHC.org
- ◆ www.Birth-Control-Comparison.info
- ◆ If you are uninsured and live in Washington State, you may qualify for FREE birth control under the State sponsored program called Take Charge. Call 800-770-4334 to find out if you qualify for Take Charge.
- ◆ Cedar River Clinics do not perform sterilization procedures at this time.

Cedar River Clinics in Renton and Tacoma, WA make birth control and abortion accessible so that women may decide their futures. www.CedarRiverClinics.org or 800-572-4223

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