

## No kids? The fix is in

Couples considering sterilization must carefully weigh their options

By **STEVE PAYNE**  
Toronto Sun

This first cut really may be the deepest: Sterilization.

In the man's case, it's a vasectomy. A quick, internal snip in the scrotum with a knife using a local anesthetic.

It takes about 10 minutes, results in a few days of discomfort and heralds a condom- and baby-free future.

Unfortunately, according to family therapists, some men believe a vasectomy will make them less of a man and refuse to take the plunge.

For women, sterilization isn't quite as simple. Tubal ligation, as its known, requires surgery under general anesthetic -- in itself more risky -- to sever the fallopian tubes.

Whatever path selected, it must be carefully considered, especially with no guarantee of reversal.

So why do people get sterilized? For a host of reasons.

Perhaps a couple don't want children. Maybe they have two or three and feel that's enough. Perhaps an individual has a life mapped out that does not include children.

Wayne, 40, of Toronto, was 32 when he had a vasectomy. He and his wife did not want children.

His doctor ordered him to think about it for six months, but the couple's minds were made up.

"We decided after 10 years of marriage that we liked the lifestyle we were in and did not want children," he recalls.

He says there was no question he would be sterilized, not his wife. "It's vastly simpler and less



(Photo: Greg Reekie, SUN)

dangerous for a man to get on a table for 15 minutes and be back at work the next day," he says.

Marilyn Belleghem, a marriage and family therapist in Oakville, says anyone opting for sterilization must be real sure of what they're getting into.

Consideration, she says, must include the chance of a death in the family or a change in partners.

Dr. Barrie de Veber, president of the de Veber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research in Toronto, recalls extreme cases where he treated children with cancer, with the parents facing the loss of a child plus the reality that one of them has already been sterilized. "Parents never think of their children dying; it is never thought of as a problem."

Couples discussing sterilization must also ponder personal feelings, adds Belleghem. If either one is sure, then that person should be the one sterilized.

"No one should be coerced into being sterilized against their will," she says. "It will lead to resentment in the relationship and that will be the beginning of the end."

Deanna Levy, 42, underwent sterilization two months ago, instead of her boyfriend. The divorced childless woman has never wanted kids. "I'm too old at this point, plus it's never been my calling," says Levy, who didn't want to be bothered with contraceptives.

Although her new beau of four months offered to undergo the procedure, she felt strongly that it should be her because she has never wanted children and, if things didn't work out between the two of them, he could always go on and have children with another partner.

Meanwhile, Karen Moore opted for sterilization after two children. "My husband was too chicken and I didn't want any more kids. Although he didn't say it, I know he felt his manliness would suffer."

Moore, 35, of Mississauga underwent the procedure two years ago and admits sex is worry-free. "With a 10- and 12-year-old, I didn't want to get back into diapers. My career is just taking off. I have no regrets," she adds.

Joy Thompson, of Planned Parenthood of Toronto, feels men should take a more leading role, arguing that for every man who has a vasectomy, four women have a tubal ligation.

"Vasectomy is effective, less invasive and far safer, yet more women have a tubal ligation," she says. "There is a myth that vasectomy in some way affects the virility, sexual libido and masculinity of a man."

A recent U.S. survey showed that of 30% of couples choosing sterilization, the woman had a tubal ligation 70% of the time.

A Canadian Institute for Health Information spokesman says accurate vasectomy statistics for Canada are not available because many are done privately. Statistics Canada was also unable to supply numbers.

The CIHI report that in the 1996-97 fiscal year, 15,637 women were sterilized in acute-care

hospitals in Canada.

Oakville urologist Dr. Richard Casey performs 300 vasectomies a year and disputes the notion that more women than men get sterilized.

"I would say it is the other way around, at least in Canada," he says, noting that the weekly vasectomy list at Oakville Hospital outweighs tubal ligations 10 to 1.

He laughs at the idea a vasectomy will hinder libido. "It will have no effect on a man's sex life," he says.

Casey says he does 15 to 20 vasectomy reversals a year, with a 70% success rate. Unlike a vasectomy, which is free, reversal costs \$3,000.

### **Here's food for fertility thought**

- According to U.S. statistics, 17% of women and 4.5% of men aged between 26-29 are already sterilized.

- Joy Thompson, of Planned Parenthood of Toronto, says too much emphasis is put on women being solely responsible for birth control.

- Dr. Barrie de Veber, president of the de Veber Institute for Bioethics and Social Research, feels lots of people get sterilized and regret it.

- One alternative to reversal surgery for couples who want children is in vitro fertilization. Eggs can be removed from a woman's ovaries, fertilized in a lab and returned to the uterus. A man's sperm could also be removed from the testes and used for in vitro fertilization.