

Alternatives to Female Sterilisation

Sterilisation is often considered by women when they are confident that they will not wish to have any more children. There are alternatives and many women will prefer these and find they have other advantages as well. The only person to decide what is best for her is the woman herself and this leaflet only aims to give more information to help that choice – her partner may also be actively involved in the decision making.

A) Male Sterilisation (vasectomy)

Vasectomy is a small operation to cut the vas deferens. This is the tube that takes sperm from the testes to the penis. Sperm are made in the testes. Once the vas deferens is cut, sperm can no longer get into the semen that is ejaculated during sex.

The advantage is that it is a permanent method and it is usually done with a local anaesthetic. It is easier to do, and more effective, than female sterilisation (failure rate for vasectomy is 1 in 2000). Most men have no problems after a vasectomy. There is a small risk of a wound infection and bruising around the operation site. A small number of men have a dull ache in the scrotum for a few months after the operation. This usually settles over time. It is a permanent method and any reversal operation is unlikely to be funded by the NHS.

B) Long acting reversible contraceptives

1) Intra Uterine Methods – Mirena/IUS/ Levosert(Hormone Coil) or IUD/Copper Coil

These can be fitted at your General Practitioner's Surgery or at the integrated Contraception and Sexual Health (iCaSH) Clinic. After an initial assessment visit this can usually be arranged within 4 weeks.

The advantage of these methods is that they are reversible and very reliable, but they can occasionally fail (less than 1 in 500). The Mirena/IUS will also make periods much lighter, shorter and possibly less painful. The IUD/Copper coil is a hormone free method but may make periods heavier and more crampy. Intrauterine methods can last from 5 - 10 years and can be replaced.

The disadvantages are that a minor fitting procedure is required. Irregular light bleeding is common for about 3 months after the fitting with either method and a minority of women experience temporary side effects such as headaches, tender breasts and acne with the Mirena/IUS.

2) Contraceptive Implant

This can be fitted at your General Practitioner's Surgery or at the iCaSH Clinic. After an initial assessment visit this can usually be arranged within 4 weeks.

The advantage of this method is that it is reversible and very reliable (more reliable than sterilisation) but does rarely fail (less than 1 in 1000). Fitting and removal are by very brief and simple procedures into the upper arm. The implant may remain for up to 3 years and can be replaced.

The disadvantages are that periods may be disrupted. The majority of women will have less bleeding than usual, but occasionally prolonged or frequent periods can occur. A few women have side effects such as headaches, mood changes, acne, weight gain and tender breasts.

3) Contraceptive injection – Depo-provera/ Sayana Press

This is an injection given into the buttock at 13-week intervals. It can be given at your General Practitioner's Surgery or at the iCaSH Clinic.

The advantage of this method is that it is very reliable as long as injections are administered on time (failure rate less than 1 in 100 with perfect use but nearer to 6 in 100 with typical use). Women using this method for at least a year are likely to have no bleeding although irregular bleeding may occur in the first 6-9 months.

The disadvantages are that some women may gain weight and there may be a delay in return to fertility (although no permanent effect) after stopping the method. The injection causes a small decrease in bone mineral density during use but this recovers after stopping the method.

These or other contraceptive alternatives can be discussed with your General Practitioner or Practice Nurse. Alternatively, you can contact the iCaSH Clinic on 0300 300 3030 for an appointment or attend the Sit & Wait Clinic between 0900-1100 Mon, Tues, Thu and Fri at iCaSH, 1a Oak Street, Norwich. NR3 3AE.

