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pon his return home, the patient will be asked to take it easy for a day or two, and there are certain restrictions on activities such as weight lifting and exercise. One traditional method to promote healing is to apply an ice pack and wear supportive briefs.

Appropriate follow-up of doctor instructions is extremely important. Generally, sexual activity can resume a week later; however, there is approximately a three-month period during which couples are still asked to have protective sex. In addition, two samples of semen are required to determine that sperm are no longer present.

It is estimated that 95 percent of men are satisfied with the procedure and enjoy its advantages. Besides being educated on the operation, it may be helpful to hear other men's experiences and decisions. Typically, men prefer not to openly discuss this private and personal subject, so perhaps the following testimonials will be helpful (some men preferred to remain anonymous):

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sically one of not being at all surprised. Most see that all I did was to follow the well-trodden path of late 30s: two kids, time for the snip," writes David Brown on his website, www.vasectomy-information.com.

Kevin von Finger had a vasectomy when he was 28 because he knew he did not want to have children. "I am ambivalent about abortions. There are a number of different decisions you have to make and others would be forced to make. My parents would say that once I had a child, I would be happy about it. Still, I knew myself. Parenting is so important, any part of you consciously or subconsciously that thinks you could not fully accept a child causes you to think long and hard about it. I didn't want to put a child through it. It might be that maybe my parents were right, but I didn't want to take a chance."

One 40-year-old Hispanic male, of El Paso, chose to have a vasectomy this year after learning his wife was pregnant for the fourth time. "I think it's a macho thing to leave it up to the woman to take care of it. I had a 50/50 sense of responsibility. I researched it and found that it was a very easy procedure. There are no changes mentally or physically. I was concerned about complications, but

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More than 500,000 vasectomies are performed every year in the United States. According to Lifespan's online health information library, www.lifespan.org, it is estimated that 42 million men worldwide choose to have a vasectomy. Most of these men are middle-aged, married with children and have chosen this procedure as a method of contraception.

Ideally, the operation should be viewed as a mutual commitment in a stable relationship between two partners who are content with their family size. Another reason for a vasectomy may be health problems that make pregnancy unsafe for their partners or the possibility of passing down genetic disorders. In a few cases, men decide they never want to have children and elect it for themselves.

Dr. David Taber, M.D., of El Paso Urology Consultants, has performed the procedure more than 4,000 times since 1969. "There is a certain amount of finality to it, and being 99 percent sure is not good enough," he insists. However, "education is what overcomes ignorance and superstition," adds Dr. Taber. Since a reversal is not 100 percent effective, he believes that it should be a heavily weighted joint decision if the candidate is married due to unforeseeable factors including divorce, death of a spouse or child and possible complications.

Dr. Phil Werthman, M.D., of the Center for Male Reproduction, writes on his website, www.malereproduction.com, that "any time a surgeon makes a cut or poke anywhere on the body, there exists the possibility for pain, bleeding, swelling or infection. The complications specific to vasectomy include failure of the procedure, sperm granu-

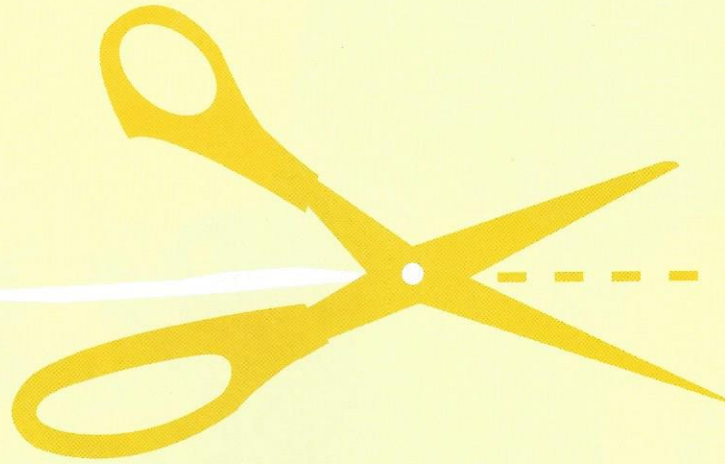
loma formation, injury to the blood supply of the testicle and chronic testicular or epididymal pain (post vasectomy pain syndrome)."

Dr. Robert Moore, M.D., of Minimally Invasive Urology of the Southwest L.L.P., stresses that the decision is a family issue. "I don't always do a vasectomy on everybody. It's about doing what is right for the patient and family," he says. "A reversal is not covered by insurance. If the men are leery and I sense pressure from the wife, I don't do it." He suggests that these patients consult an OB/GYN to cover all options. "Things have changed for sterility in females, and I just want to make sure everybody is on board."

Research generally supports that a vasectomy is a reliable, practical, cost-effective and convenient option. Wikipedia states "that it affects neither the production of male sex hormones nor their secretion into the bloodstream." Sperm will continue to be generated by the testicles. The basic premise is the interruption of the transport of sperm by removing a small portion of the *vas deferens*. Sperm makes up only 2 to 5 percent of semen, subsequently there will be no noticeable difference in volume and appearance.

Once a man has decided to go through with the process, it is helpful to know exactly what this 15- to 30-minute procedure will entail. First, a small area on the scrotum is washed with surgical soap and shaved. Second, a local anesthetic is administered. Some men compare the pain and discomfort of this to receiving an injection at the dentist. Third, the doctor makes one to two small incisions (depending on the method) and lifts the right or left *vas deferens* through the opening, which is described as a slight pulling sensation. Fourth, the two ends of the *vas* are cauterized, tied or clipped before being returned to the scrotum. Fifth, the remaining *vas* receives the same procedure. Lastly, depending on the doctor and the method, there may be a stitch or two.

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the fear was gone after speaking to the doctor. It stung a little, and I felt a tight pinch when the liquid went in. You grow up thinking nobody is going to touch that delicate area and couldn't imagine getting it done. But it's not a difficult procedure whatsoever, and I highly recommend it."

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Rudy Aguilar, 37, has made an appointment for a vasectomy five times and canceled every one. "It was too permanent. Right when I got to thinking about it, I thought maybe I should wait. Maybe I was making the decision based on being tired and fatigued with two little ones." His decision ended up working out when his wife needed to start birth control for medical reasons. This allowed them to feel more secure about their method of family planning.

One 33-year-old white male, also of El Paso, decided to have the procedure done after his wife endured two high-risk pregnancies. "I was convinced I was going to get one. Looking back, I can see

some telltale signs I should have paid attention to. One, the doctor's desk was piled high with unopened mail. Two, he had a vat with instruments being sterilized. I prefer to see medical instruments come out of the wrapper. Three, he was training a male nurse who was making horrible faces at what he was seeing. I had to ask the guy to move. When the doctor was finished he said: 'Congratulations, you did really good. I've had a lot of patients have seizures.'" It took this man four days to recover from the pain and another week feeling uncomfortable and sore. For the record, he states that everything is fine now.

Bill Baker, 79, had a vasectomy performed in 1953. "Our youngest son was just born, and [my wife] had so many problems with it. The doctor said she should never have anymore children; if she did, it would probably kill her. Through more discussion, he recommended that a vasectomy would be easier for me than any surgery for her. I was surprised that was an option. The doctor assured me it would have no reflection on the desire to have sex. For the sake of her health, I went ahead and had it done. It was not painful or unbearable. Back then, the people I talked to about it were very surprised I had it done and said they would never do it. I told them: 'You don't know what you're missing.'"

The general consensus of these men concluded that the spontaneity and freedom gained by having a vasectomy was worth it. However, the motivations to have this elective surgery should be carefully considered and explored along with researching the doctor, procedure and possible complications associated with it. **ep**