

# Male Infertility

Each year, more than 500,000 American men undergo vasectomy, an outpatient surgical procedure that is one of the most reliable methods of permanent birth control available today.

**As some patients have found**, however, life can take unexpected turns.

“About five percent of men with vasectomies choose to have them reversed at a later date,” says **Dr. Aaron Spitz**, a UCI Medical Center urologist.



Remarriage is one of the leading reasons why they seek to restore their fertility. And now, thanks to microsurgical methods, it's possible to reverse a vasectomy with greater success than ever before.

**Reconnections.** During a vasectomy, surgeons remove small segments of the two vas deferens and seal the ends. Normally, these small

tubes transport sperm from the testicles to the urethra, a passageway inside the penis through which semen is ejaculated. But after a vasectomy, the sperm meet an insurmountable barrier when they reach the blocked vas deferens.

Reversing a vasectomy, called a vasovasostomy, involves opening the sealed ends of the vas deferens and reconnecting them. It requires the skills of an experienced urologist, who must perfectly align and rejoin the pinhole-size openings of the tubes using sutures that are finer than a human eyelash.

A major study recently confirmed the success rate

of this procedure.

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vasectomies were performed less than three years before the reversal had

a 97 percent chance that sperm flow would be reestablished and a 76 percent chance that a pregnancy would result,” says Spitz. “If the vasectomy was performed 15 or more years earlier, chances dropped to 71 percent for reestablishing sperm flow and 30 percent for initiating a pregnancy.”

The pressure that sometimes builds up in the tubes behind the vasectomy scar can add to the

challenge, causing blockages and ruptures in the epididymis—the structure in which sperm are stored until they've matured. If an epididymis “blowout” occurs, it can prevent sperm from entering the vas deferens. In this case, a more involved procedure is necessary. It entails connecting the tubes directly to the epididymis. “No matter how complex the situation, it's rare that a vasectomy can't be reversed by an experienced urologist,” says Spitz.

**Fatherhood revisited.** As a specialist, Spitz also treats a wide range of other problems related to male infertility. The process begins with a thorough physical examination, accompanied by a medical and fertility history. “The inability to father a child can be caused by a number of conditions,” says Spitz. “Among them are chronic disease, injuries, childhood illnesses, congenital conditions, hormone deficiencies, smoking and other lifestyle choices, medications and pelvic surgery involving structures such as the prostate gland and reproductive organs.”

One or more of these problems can contribute to deficient sperm production—the leading cause of male infertility. “Normally, there are 60 million or more sperm per milliliter of semen,” says Spitz. “If the number drops significantly, it may be difficult for a couple to achieve pregnancy.”

One of the most common reasons for this disorder is varicoceles—bundles of enlarged veins in the scrotum. When blood pools in these distended veins, it warms the nearby testicles, affecting the production and function of sperm. Varicoceles are repaired during a technically demanding operation in which the surgeon ties off the veins to prevent blood from pooling. More than half of varicocele patients see an improvement in their fertility within a year following surgery. They join an increasing number of men whose only hope for fatherhood lies in the advances made in the field of male infertility over the past few years.

For referral to a UCI Medical Center urologist, call 714-456-7005.