

photo by David Ballard Photography

The Essure Procedure

Incision-Free Female Sterilization

by Jennifer Derrick

Although most people probably think of the Pill as the main pregnancy prevention method, female sterilization is another one of our nation's top contraceptives. A fact sheet from the National Center for Health Statistics shows that of women aged 15-44 years, 19 percent use the Pill, 17 percent use female sterilization, and 6 percent rely on male sterilization.

For women who want to "get their tubes tied," there's a relatively new alternative requiring no incisions. While the procedure, dubbed Essure, has been approved for use in the U.S. since 2002, Dr. Jennifer Boyle, of Northland-OBGYN Associates, says many people are still unaware of it. "I think it's a great procedure," comments Dr. Boyle, who has been certified for over two years to carry out the Essure procedure. "It's a better choice than tubal ligations."



The Procedure

Tubal ligations require a general anesthetic and must be performed in the hospital. Conversely, women who undergo Essure will first be given a cramp reducing medicine to help keep the fallopian tubes open and will then be administered a local anesthetic. The entire operation takes place at the doctor's office.

While women who get their tubes tied will actually have one to two incisions to have their fallopian tubes clamped, cut, or burned in places, the Essure procedure requires no incisions. Here's how it works: spring-like micro-inserts are



placed into each fallopian tube. These inserts gradually prompt the body to grow tissue over them, so that after 12 weeks, most women's tubes will be completely blocked, preventing sperm from reaching and fertilizing an egg.

Since it doesn't involve cutting, the recovery time from Essure is quicker and less painful when compared to tubal ligations and vasectomies. Instead of the four to six days recovery needed for tubal ligations and the two to three days recovery for vasectomies, most women are back to normal within 24 hours. For

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some, there's no recovery time. One woman Dr. Boyle completed the procedure on felt so good, that instead of resting, she went shopping, and later, dancing.

Because the Essure procedure requires no general anesthesia or cutting, it can be performed in the doctor's office, which tends to make patients more at ease. People are subconsciously put-off by having to schedule a hospital appointment. Making an appointment at a woman's regular clinic is much less intimidating, notes Boyle.

Another benefit to the Essure procedure is that most health insurance plans cover it, so many women will only have to pay an office fee

Things To Consider

Extremely important for women who are interested in the procedure is the fact that it's not reversible, making it even more permanent than tubal ligations, which about 50 percent of the time can be effectively reversed. Women who are considering Essure must be positive they don't want any more children.

"As physicians, we try to select the right patients to make sure there is no regret," says Dr. Boyle. Typically, the younger a woman is, the higher the risk is of her regretting a sterilization decision.

The most problematic thing with the procedure at this point, says Boyle, is that "we can't guarantee it will work for everyone." Ninety-four point six percent of the time, the inserts can be placed properly, but the other 5.4 percent of the time, they can't. Sometimes polyps and scar tissue prevent proper placement of the inserts, and that's something doctors won't know until the actual time of the procedure.

Since body tissue gradually forms over the inserts, women must use another form of birth control for the first three months after getting the procedure. At the three-month follow-up appointment, women are given a special type of x-ray that verifies whether or not the fallopian tubes are entirely blocked.

Although Essure isn't guaranteed to be 100 percent effective, after five years of clinical trials, there have been zero pregnancies for women who had the procedure. The Essure procedure may have nothing on the 50 some years of tubal ligations, but it has been studied closely since 1997, with U.S. approval in 2002. The inserts are made of the same safe materials used for heart valves and stents, and contain no hormones. As with any procedure, there are some risks - but overall, it seems like the better choice compared with other available options.

Whatever you do, educate yourself about the procedure before bringing it to the next level. ♦

For more information, go to www.essure.com or talk to your doctor.

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