

A Million Women Have a New Choice Essure for Permanent Birth Control

DID YOU KNOW THAT one million American women undergo a tubal ligation (have their tubes tied) for permanent contraception every year—even though there's a safer, minimally invasive office procedure available across the United States? It's called Essure and it's 99.8% effective (based on following patients for four years).

I heard about this relatively new procedure several years ago and think everyone should know about it. Why? Because it's less risky than a tubal ligation or a vasectomy. Essure also costs half as much as a tubal ligation, can be done in the office under local anesthesia, and it's safe. Essure doesn't change your hormones; involve cutting, clipping, or burning; require an IV or any blood work, and often it's covered by insurance. If that doesn't give you a reason to check into Essure, this will: There's a test to let you know that the procedure was a success and you can rely on Essure for birth control.

Doctor's Advice

The Essure procedure involves plugging the fallopian tube with a feather-light coil that's smaller than the spring in a Bic pen. This "corks" the tube, which will scar and completely close within three months. The coil is made of the same material as cardiac stents, which have been used for many years and are safe. Once the tubes are closed, sperm can't reach the egg to fertilize it, so the body just absorbs it. Because the tube itself isn't injured there's no interruption to the blood supply to the tube or ovary, which, in standard tubal ligations, may result in something known as "post tubal ligation syndrome" where periods become heavy or irregular following a tubal. Though this syndrome is controversial and there is disagreement about whether or not it's valid, I've seen enough menstrual problems following tubal ligations to prefer a method that keeps all the organs completely intact. And Essure does that.

I talked with Chris Olsen, M.D., an ob/gyn in Naperville, Illinois who has been doing the procedure for several years. Like me, he first saw the research on the procedure and then sought out the company to learn more. He told me that in his view (and I agree!) it should be the first procedure a woman thinks of when she wants permanent contraception. It's just as effective as a routine tubal ligation, especially those done post-partum.

Many women who are having a C-section want their tubes tied during that surgery—which, on the surface, makes sense. But there are a couple issues with this. One is that the tubes are so big from the effects of pregnancy that the failure rate is higher. Another problem is that it's not wise to make a decision about permanent birth control while you're pregnant. It's much better to wait until three to four months postpartum when your body and hormones are returning to normal—and you are really sure you don't want any more



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ESSURE FOR PERMANENT BIRTH CONTROL

Continued from the previous page

children! Then it's very easy to simply schedule an Essure procedure in the doctor's office. Just know that, unlike some sterilization procedures, Essure isn't reversible.

What to Expect

The procedure is done using a type of anesthesia known as a paracervical block. A patient can also take Xanax or other anti-anxiety medication an hour prior to the procedure. You can watch the procedure on a flat screen television as an instrument known as a hysteroscopy is placed into the uterus through the cervix. Better yet, the hysteroscope is miniscule—it's diameter no bigger than the cannula (slender tube) used to insert an IUD. It's done in the first half of the cycle to be sure a woman isn't already pregnant.

Essure takes less than fifteen minutes, most patients go home in less than an hour, and most women return to their normal daily routine within a day! Immediately after the procedure, you may experience some cramping and some spotting or light bleeding. You continue to get your period (like you would if you had a tubal ligation), although some women notice that it changes slightly, becoming somewhat heavier or lighter. This change typically doesn't last, and because the Essure inserts are free of hormones, your periods typically return to how they were before the procedure.

Believe me, if Essure had been available when I had my own tubal ligation at age 37 it's exactly what I would have had. (I was torn between having another child and writing a book. I knew I didn't have the energy for both. So, I had my tubes done. After a seven-year pregnancy, *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom* was born!) As it was, I had my tubal under local anesthesia in a doctor's office, along with my sister. Most women have theirs in the hospital under general anesthesia. You can read about our "Moving Into Greater Fertility" ritual in my book *Women's Bodies, Women's Wisdom*.

To learn more about Essure and to find a practitioner in your area, go to www.essure.com.

The original article, *A Million Women Have a New Choice – Essure for Permanent Birth Control*, can be found in the archives on www.drnorthrup.com.