

Frequently Asked Questions

What is sterilization?

Sterilization is a permanent method of **birth control**. Sterilization for women is called tubal sterilization. In tubal sterilization, the **fallopian tubes** are closed off or removed. Tubal sterilization prevents an **egg** from moving down a fallopian tube to the **uterus** and keeps **sperm** from reaching the egg (read [Sterilization for Women and Men](#)).

What is postpartum sterilization?

Postpartum sterilization is sterilization performed after the birth of a baby. After a woman gives birth, the fallopian tubes and the still-enlarged uterus are located just under the abdominal wall below the belly button. Postpartum sterilization ideally is done before the uterus returns to its normal location, usually within a few hours or days following delivery. For women who have had a **cesarean birth**, the procedure can be done right after the baby is born.

What are the advantages of postpartum sterilization?

Postpartum sterilization is a highly effective method of birth control. Fewer than 1 in 100 women who have a tubal sterilization will get pregnant within 1 year of the surgery. The surgery can be done while you are still in the hospital after having a baby. Once it is done you have immediate and lifelong birth control.

It's important to know that in the small number of women who get pregnant after sterilization, about 20 percent have an **ectopic pregnancy**. Also, sterilization does not

protect against [sexually transmitted infections \(STIs\)](#) , including [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\)](#) . Use latex or polyurethane condoms if you are at risk of STIs.

How is postpartum sterilization performed?

For women who have had a vaginal delivery, a small incision is made in the abdomen (a procedure called [minilaparotomy](#)). For women who have had a cesarean birth, postpartum sterilization can be done through the same abdominal incision (cut) that was made to deliver the baby. The fallopian tubes are brought up through the incision. The tubes are cut and closed with special thread or removed completely. The incision below the belly button is closed with stitches and a bandage.

What kind of anesthesia is used for postpartum sterilization?

Often, the type of [anesthesia](#) used for the delivery can be used for postpartum sterilization. Types of anesthesia used include [regional anesthesia](#) , [general anesthesia](#) , or [local anesthesia](#) .

How long does postpartum sterilization take?

The surgery takes about 30 minutes. Having it done soon after childbirth usually does not make your hospital stay longer.

What are the side effects of postpartum sterilization?

Side effects may depend on the type of anesthesia used and the way the surgery is performed. You may have pain in your abdomen and feel tired. Some less common side effects include

- dizziness
- nausea
- shoulder pain
- abdominal cramps
- gassy or bloated feeling
- sore throat (from the breathing tube if general anesthesia was used)

If you have abdominal pain that does not go away after a few days, if pain is severe, or if you have a fever, contact your [obstetrician–gynecologist \(ob-gyn\)](#) right away.

Are there risks associated with postpartum sterilization?

In general, sterilization is a safe surgery. It has a low risk of death and [complications](#). The most common complications are those that are related to general anesthesia. Other risks include bleeding and infection.

When should sterilization be avoided?

You should avoid making this choice during times of stress (such as during a divorce). You also should not make this choice under pressure from a partner or others. Research shows that women younger than age 30 are more likely than older women to regret having the procedure. If your baby has complications or serious health problems, you may want to give yourself more time to think about sterilization.

What if I decide I want to get pregnant after sterilization?

If you choose to have sterilization and you change your mind later, attempts to reverse it may not work. After tubal sterilization is reversed, many women still are not able to get pregnant. Also, the risk of problems, such as ectopic pregnancy, is increased after sterilization is reversed.

What are some alternatives to postpartum sterilization?

[Long-acting reversible contraception](#), such as the [intrauterine device \(IUD\)](#) or implant, last for several years. They are about as effective at preventing pregnancy as sterilization. They can be removed at any time if you want to get pregnant.

Glossary

Anesthesia: Relief of pain by loss of sensation.

Birth Control: Devices or medications used to prevent pregnancy.

Cesarean Birth: Birth of a fetus from the uterus through an incision (cut) made in the woman's abdomen.

Complications: Diseases or conditions that happen as a result of another disease or condition. An example is pneumonia that occurs as a result of the flu. A complication also can occur as a result of a condition, such as pregnancy. An example of a pregnancy complication is preterm labor.

Ectopic Pregnancy: A pregnancy in a place other than the uterus, usually in one of the fallopian tubes.

Egg: The female reproductive cell made in and released from the ovaries. Also called the ovum.

Fallopian Tube: Tube through which an egg travels from the ovary to the uterus.

General Anesthesia: The use of drugs that create a sleep-like state to prevent pain during surgery.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV): A virus that attacks certain cells of the body's immune system. If left untreated, HIV can cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Intrauterine Device (IUD): A small device that is inserted and left inside the uterus to prevent pregnancy.

Local Anesthesia: The drugs that stop pain in a part of the body.

Minilaparotomy: A small abdominal cut used for a surgery in which the fallopian tubes are closed off as a form of permanent birth control.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

Postpartum Sterilization: A permanent procedure that prevents a woman from becoming pregnant, done soon after the birth of a child.

Regional Anesthesia: The use of drugs to block sensation in a region of the body.

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Infections that are spread by sexual contact. Infections include chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus (HPV), herpes, syphilis,

and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS]).

Sperm: A cell made in the male testicles that can fertilize a female egg.

Sterilization: A permanent method of birth control.

Uterus: A muscular organ in the female pelvis. During pregnancy, this organ holds and nourishes the fetus. Also called the womb.

If you have further questions, contact your ob-gyn.

Don't have an ob-gyn? [Learn how to find a doctor near you.](#)

FAQ052

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