

Contact: KMR Communications, Inc.  
P: 212.213.6444  
F: 212.213.4699  
[info@kmrcommunications.com](mailto:info@kmrcommunications.com)



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## CAN YOU REVERSE A VASECTOMY?

Priorities Have Changed Since 9/11

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**New York, NY June 11, 2002** - Ordinarily, June 11<sup>th</sup> 2002 would be just another day, but this year it marked a post 9/11 baby boom. Those who had put off having children in order to climb the corporate ladder or afford flashy cars re-assessed their priorities and decided that family comes first. For many men, this meant reversing the very procedure that was performed to render them sterile. Each year, 100-200 thousand men seek vasectomies, and approximately 5% ultimately change their mind. How can wannabe fathers who have had a vasectomy change their fertility status?

The good news is that vasectomy can be reversed with a procedure known as vasovasostomy. **Dr. Philip Werthman is a urologist and male fertility expert in Los Angeles, California. In the post September 11<sup>th</sup> climate he saw more male patients than ever before who wanted to reverse their vasectomies.** As he explains, "most people think that the vasectomy procedure is permanent and this is a great misnomer. However, the sooner a reversal is done after vasectomy, the greater the chance of achieving a pregnancy. When less than three years have elapsed between the original surgery and the reversal, 76% of men are able impregnate their partners." Before the advent of microsurgical techniques, vasectomy reversal procedures were only occasionally successful. With the relatively recent advances in microsurgical techniques, instruments and suture materials, success rates have greatly increased.

Another myth about vasectomy reversal is that it will be painful. Many patients report that the reversal has an easier recovery than the actual vasectomy. Dr. Werthman performs the reversal as an out patient microsurgical procedure that takes about 1 ½ to 2 hours to perform. During a vasectomy the surgeon cuts two tubes called the vas deferens, ties them off, and creates a sperm blockage in the ejaculate fluid. To reverse this, a tiny incision is made to micro surgically hook the two tube ends back together. Patients typically recover at home for five days. They return to see Dr. Werthman approximately 3 ½ weeks post surgically to check for the presence of sperm. It is often difficult to tell how successful vasectomy reversal is at returning men's sperm counts to their pre-vasectomy levels simply because very few men go to the trouble of getting a sperm count before their vasectomies.

### **There are three main reasons why men seek reversal:**

- They are remarried to a woman who doesn't have children, although the man may have had children from a previous marriage.
- Improved financial situation which allows them to have more children.
- Death of a child.

**Can all vasectomies be reversed?** As Dr. Werthman explains, "from a surgical standpoint, it is rare that a vasectomy cannot be reversed. In the past, if the epididymis was blocked or a large segment of the vas deferens was removed during the vasectomy, a vasectomy reversal procedure was considered to be too complicated and was unlikely to be successful. Today, however, the development of new microsurgical techniques has provided a way to bypass an epididymal blockage and correct a shortened vas deferens. These new techniques have led to improved pregnancy rates following vasectomy reversal even in the most extreme cases."

**What to do before considering reversal?** A man's partner should undergo a gynecological exam to ensure adequate fertility potential. For older couples or those whose family history indicates, genetic counseling may also be helpful. No special preoperative tests are needed before a vasectomy reversal other than the standard lab tests required by some hospitals, ambulatory surgery facilities or anesthesiologists. For men more than 40 years old, an EKG (a test that records the electrical activity in the heart) is usually required. The difficulty in testing for anti-sperm antibodies before reversal surgery is that only serum (blood) antibodies can be tested, which do not accurately predict the antibodies that may be found in the semen after the operation. Because of these difficulties, most surgeons do not find anti-sperm antibody testing to be useful.

Because of the expense, lower pregnancy rates, and potential side effects from hormonal therapy for the female partner, reversal surgery, and in most cases, repeat reversal surgery are options of first choice for vasectomized men. In-Vitro Fertilization (IVF) is an option to consider if vasectomy reversal is unsuccessful, rather than as an alternative to surgery. A new study published in March 2002 shows vasectomy reversal to be more successful than IVF in establishing a pregnancy and much better than IVF if the wife is over 40 years old. It is also three times less expensive to have a baby by reversing the vasectomy than with IVF. Although the science of fertility has advanced, no other technique offers a more safe and cost-effective way of achieving pregnancy, as does vasectomy reversal.

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