

News

'On-off' vasectomy for men

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387 words

8 March 2008

The Independent on Saturday

e110

English

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Vasectomies could be a thing of the past thanks to a remote controlled implant that can stop the flow of sperm.

The valve-like device can be opened and shut at the press of a button, using the same technology that locks a car using a key fob.

Scientists who invented the implant say it could be used as a form of male contraception. Men who change their minds about having children would then simply point the remote handset at their testicles and press a button to open up the valve.

The procedure usually involves making two small cuts near each testicle and cutting the vas deferens, the tubes that carry sperm. A small section of each tube is removed and the two ends sealed, either by tying a knot in them or heating them up with a probe.

The procedure is carried out with a local anaesthetic and the dissolvable stitches usually disappear in a week. Reversal involves sewing the two cut ends back together. But it only works in around 50% of cases, often because scarring stops sperm getting through.

Research

Research also suggests vasectomies leave many men with abnormalities in their sperm.

The remote-controlled implant, still at the very early stages of testing, could be a much more attractive alternative. It is made from silicone-based materials, which the body's defence mechanisms usually recognise as friendly, so reducing the risk of reaction or infection.

As it is no larger than a grain of rice, it can be inserted into each sperm-carrying tube using a needle.

Prof **Derek Abbott**, who heads the research team at the University of **Adelaide**, said the idea was that the valve remained shut most of the time and acted as a contraceptive barrier.

A man would then use the handset to open it around the time of having sex if he and his partner wanted to conceive. Once the handset is pressed, it sends a coded radio signal through the skin to the implant, which contains a tiny antenna. The antenna picks up the signal and converts it into sound waves that "ripple"

through the valve. Since the valve itself is soft and flexible, the sound waves make it flap open – allowing sperm to pass through. – Daily Mail

9905199

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