

[Home](#) » [Opinion](#) » Article

It's hip to get the snip

Simon Webster
September 29, 2008

AUSTRALIA is the vasectomy capital of the world. One in three Aussie men blokes aged in their 40s and 50s has had the snip, says family planning charity Marie Stopes, a figure matched by no men on Earth (except the Kiwis, who for the purposes of this story have been granted Australian citizenship).

Young men's scrotums being punctured . . . like party balloons is not an ideal state of affairs.

"It's due to some fairly good education and some assertive Australian women," Jill Michelson, general manager operations at Marie Stopes, said last week, assertively. "We're fortunate Australian men are becoming responsible husbands."

However, a new generation of young guns from the States is firing blanks willy nilly across the Pacific and threatening to take our mantle away.

Only one in six Americans over 35 has had the snip, but single 20-something American men are turning to the operation in increasing numbers, US publications including the *Chicago Tribune* and men.style.com have reported. Social analysts say this is because getting a chick pregnant would, like, totally not rock, dude.

While men taking on responsibility for contraception is admirable, vasectomies are not always easy to reverse, and young men's scrotums being punctured left, right and centre like party balloons is not an ideal state of affairs.

A solution may be around the corner in the form of an Australian-designed system that switches a man's sperm flow on and off by remote control, operating a tiny valve injected into the vas deferens, the tube that carries sperm from the testes. In a bid to get men to embrace the new technology it is understood the remote can also be programmed to lock the car, shut the garage door, dim the bedroom lights, play a Barry White CD, record the football and put a pizza in the oven for afterwards.

Professor Derek Abbott from the University of Adelaide invented the system, which appeared on *The New Inventors* in June.

"I've been inundated with inquiries from men from all over the world," Abbott said in *The Times* this month.

Unfortunately the valve will need five years of animal trials before it can be used in human beings. The first four years will involve training rats how to use a remote.

The valve is just one of a number of high-tech reversible male contraceptive devices - known in leading scientific circles as "gizmos" - under development, *The Times* reports. In California a team is developing an implantable ring that circles the vas deferens and zaps sperm, making them unable to fertilise an egg.

Researchers recommend playing hardcore techno music rather than Barry White so that the sound of zapping blends in with the soundtrack. However, men over 30 have been warned not to try to keep pace with any tracks of more than 200 beats per minute.

A better method might be RISUG (reversible inhibition of sperm under guidance), which partially blocks sperm tubes and alters sperm through the injection of a compound. It takes 10 minutes and lasts 10 years.

RISUG is being trialled in India and may be on the market there within two years. Elaine Lissner, director of the non-profit Male Contraception Information Project in San Francisco, told *The Times* she could see Western men flying to India to get the injections, though it's unlikely their partners would still be in the mood by the time they got back.

"Men want new contraceptive methods," Lissner said. "A decade ago demand wasn't there and it was assumed women wouldn't trust men to take charge of birth control anyway. That has changed."

However, getting something from the laboratory to the pharmacy shelf is proving a slow process. Pharmaceutical companies are put off by the liability involved in testing on healthy young men, Lissner said, which must induce a lot of sympathy in healthy young women gradually being made unhealthy by the pill.

Lissner called on governments and charities to get involved in funding the next stage of trials. There are potentially more options out there than there are wrigglers in a specimen jar.

Neem extracts and papaya seeds, says the International Male Contraception Coalition (see malecontraceptives.org). Apparently a dry orgasm pill made a big splash when it was mooted two years ago.

Heat methods include a battery-operated scrotum heater, which would also provide somewhere to keep your hands warm in winter.

Alternatively, special underpants known as suspensories kill sperm by holding the testes close to the body, with the only side-effects being chafing and speaking in a very high voice.

Perhaps the most promising method involves blasting the testes with ultrasound. Not only does this disrupt sperm production for six months, but you get to take home a picture of them too.

In other news ...

The Federal Government is getting tough with cigarette makers. Within two years manufacturers will only be able to sell self-extinguishing cigarettes, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported last week.

Manufacturers will no longer be able to use burn additives, which keep the cigarettes alight even when no one is sucking on them.

NSW Fire Brigades, which has been lobbying for the change, says fires started by cigarettes were responsible for at least 67 deaths in Australia between 2000 and 2006.

Meanwhile, 15,000 Australians die from smoking-related diseases each year, says the Government's Quit campaign. Banning cigarettes that light up might be more effective.

swebster@fastmail.com.au

- [Email](#)
- [Print this story](#)
- [Normal font](#)
- [Large font](#)
- [Add to Facebook](#)
- [Add to del.icio.us](#)
- [Digg this story](#)
- [RSS Feed](#)

When news happens:

send photos, videos & tip-offs to 0424 SMS SMH (+61 424 767 764), or [email](#) us.

[Did you know you could pay less than \\$1 a day for a subscription to the Herald? Subscribe today.](#)

Copyright © 2008. The Sydney Morning Herald.