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My Husband Had A Vasectomy And All I Got Was This Lousy T-Shirt

Posted: 05/21/2012 10:03 am

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My husband is the introverted type, so out of respect for his privacy, I'd like to talk to you about his vasectomy.

We put it off longer than we should have. I guess the ideal time might have been between baby no. 2 and baby no. 3, but we're super happy with the one that slid underneath the closing door, all Indiana Jones-style: "Waaaaiiiit you have one moooore!" But at some point you have to just make the arbitrary decision that you're done meeting new offspring.

So we finally made the call that it was time to turn the spigot off. An informal survey revealed that getting a vasectomy was the birth control method of choice among the vast majority of older parents in our circle. It's minimally-invasive, complications are rare, and (who knew?) our insurance covered it. Seemed as though the only prerequisite was a few days' freedom to convalesce on the couch and several bags of frozen peas.

We described the procedure to our children, the youngest of whom is five, figuring they'd naturally wonder what was going to make Daddy walk around the house in a half-crouch in a Vicodin-created fugue state. We spent some time describing the vas deferens, and the special seeds that help Mama's egg become a baby, carefully playing up the benefits (no additional sibling rivalry!) and downplaying the discomfort (it won't hurt more than getting a shot).

Yet still, the very next time I brought my youngest, Molly (who's five) out in public, she announced to any and all within earshot: "My daddy's getting his penis cut off." I protested with nervous giggles the first few times, but after awhile took great satisfaction in merely raising my eyebrows and glaring silently.

In honor of the procedure, my husband's coworkers served two types of cheese balls with carrots and celery sticks, artfully arranged. Oh: and mixed nuts.

I kind of assumed I'd be on The Pill until menopause rendered my womb a windswept desert nurturing nothing but a bleached rock outcropping and occasional tumbleweed, but lo! Verdant and lavishly fertile, and already relieved of the threat of childbearing. It's a medical miracle.

I'd like to chalk up the following unsuspected side effect to the array of painkillers my husband was on when he came home from the surgery: when I arrived from taking our Molly to her first dance class, I sat next to him, all propped with pillows and sipping water through a straw, and flipped through the photos I'd snapped on my phone. Molly's leotard and tutu are far from new -- like all of her clothes, they're hand-me-downs several times over. So the crotch hangs to mid-thigh and the tutu is torn and hanging low on one side. There's a small rip in one knee of the black tights. At first glance there is nothing pathetic about this picture; she's a happy girl, hands on hips, looking off to the side. She has the sort of hardscrabble disposition you would expect from the youngest of three. But of our children, she is the only dancer. Music moves her physically. My husband slid past this picture and then slid back and regarded it silently for a moment. I felt the wonder and grief behind his simple words: "That's my last baby."

And in a flash: my own times of bed confinement, postponing early labor. Cups of crushed ice and marshmallows, surer signs of pregnancy than a positive test for me. Vernix-covered little red crying faces, one after the other, lain against my chest. There was the cutting of the umbilical cord, always a bittersweet moment, giving that baby over to the world and all its variables, the concept of protection an illusion. And then there is this last cut. A "relatively pain-free procedure." And just like that, we say goodbye to all of it, say with certainty that we are done, we are parents to these three and no more, no longer getting to rewind the tape with each newborn, to relive that particular kind of falling in love.