



# Vasectomies in New Zealand: What you need to know



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Mike Lane, during his 2017 vasectomy. Photo / Facebook

## Three Kiwi men take you into the operating room to tell the inside story of their vasectomies.

The video of Mike Lane's 2017 vasectomy can still be viewed online. It's a riveting watch. Lane lies back, wearing a sea captain's hat, a cell phone in each hand, watching a live international cricket match on one, and providing live commentary on the other:

"Hazelwood, now none for 35," he says at one point, "and I can't feel my balls".

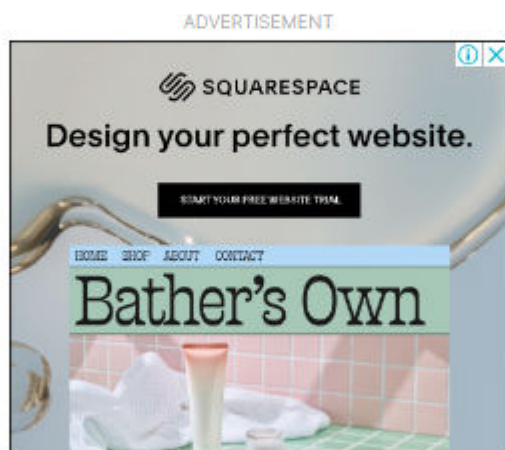
As head of the [Alternative Commentary Collective \(ACC\)](#), home of New Zealand's funniest live sports commentaries, Lane is used to mining his life for content. When he decided to have a vasectomy, he knew it could make for a landmark moment in both broadcasting and vasectomies. After discussing it with fellow ACC commentator Jeremy Wells, he scheduled it to take place during that summer's one-day international between New Zealand and Australia at Eden Park.

The [broadcast, which made global news](#), was billed as the first live sporting commentary to be delivered during a vasectomy, but for Lane it was far more important than that. His wife had just given birth to their third child, and they knew they couldn't take any more.

He says the decision was made long before the birth of their third child and the vasectomy took place just four weeks after. There was never any question, he says, that vasectomy would be their birth control of choice.

"I've got three children," he says. "I've watched my wife go through the birth of three children. The least – the least! – I could do was spend half an hour in a clinic, having my vas deferens cauterized."

Prior to the procedure, Lane received an instructional package from his doctor, which included a disposable razor. He says the instructions said to shave only the area "between the bottom and your balls".



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"I didn't read the instructions, obviously," Lane says. "I just saw the razor. And so I went to town. I had like a one-hour hot shower. I completely shaved every single hair off my groin area. And then when I went to [the doctor] and he was like, 'Okay, have you done all the reading, all the prep?' I said 'Yeah, check it out.' And I dropped my gown." He says the doctor laughed at him.

Lane had requested only a small amount of local anaesthetic in order that his commentary would not be hindered, but he says the procedure was nevertheless straightforward, painless and easy.



Having said that, there is a point in the video where he goes silent and rigid, with his mouth wide open and eyes closed. It's hard to say exactly what emotion the look conveys: "He looks as if he's [receiving oral pleasure](#)", says one of his co-commentators.



Mike Lane. Photo / Greg Bowker

"It's not painful," Lane says of the procedure now. "It is uncomfortable. There's no denying that it is. It's uncomfortable because it's a sensitive area. And it's not every day you have a doctor tugging on your vas deferens. You can feel that tugging up into your stomach, so that's why it's kind of unnerving."

However, he says he was surprised by how non-invasive the procedure was. "I was imagining, like, opening your nutsack up and fossicking around in there," he says. "It doesn't require stitches. You don't get stitched up or anything. They just put a plaster on it."

"I don't understand why people get too uptight about it. I know why – it's old school, around some sort of [emasculated issue](#) or, I don't know, perception that it 'does something' to you. I think that's probably the biggest barrier."

Although some men choose to bring their partners to the clinic, Lane categorically did not. "Shit no," he says. "This is a thing that should be done on your own... Your wife does not need to smell your burning vas deferens."

It takes several months after the procedure before a patient can have unprotected sex with high confidence it won't result in pregnancy. Typically, patients are advised to wait at least three months before producing and delivering a semen sample to be given the all-clear.

Lane's doctor also recommended a minimum 20 [ejaculations](#) before testing, in order to clear any sperm that may remain in the vas deferens beyond the vasectomy site.

"I went off to get tested and my wife said, 'Didn't the doctor say 20?' and I said 'Yeah', and she said, 'I'm pretty sure I've only been involved in two or three of those'."

Lane's lasting memory of his vasectomy is of going straight back to the ACC caravan at Eden Park, sitting on a pouf and commentating on the rest of the game, which he remembers as a great one, in which New Zealand beat Australia by one wicket, with [Kane Williamson running out Marcus Stoinis to win the game](#).

A typical vasectomy takes about 10 minutes. The doctor feels through the patient's skin for the tubes (the vas deferens) that carry sperm from the testicles. Long-time Auckland vasectomist Dr Jonathan Masters, better known as the Vasman, describes the vas deferens as looking "literally like white spaghetti", although, he says, it varies in size from person to person and can be as thin as vermicelli, meaning that doctors need to be quite skilled at identifying it by feel, through the patient's skin.

Once located, the doctor makes a small incision in the skin, pulls a section of each tube out, one at a time, cuts them, seals each end (typically by cauterizing) so that sperm can't get through, and then returns them to the body.

While the procedure itself is fast, appointment times are typically half an hour or longer, in order to accommodate formalities, nervous chitchat and any contingencies. While doctors recommend not doing anything strenuous for a day or two afterwards, you can drive yourself home, and if your job is sedentary there's nothing to stop you going straight back to it.

As for how long after the vasectomy before you can have sex, recommendations vary. Some doctors say you can go for it when you feel up to it, while others recommend waiting at least three days and still others suggest waiting a week or more.

Tony Hamilton (not his real name) says he put off his vasectomy for years because he "didn't want to face up to it".

"I wanted to know as little as possible," he says. "I was actually quite nervous about it."

"Maybe I got kicked in the nads too many times when I was in school. Or just had too many soccer balls land there. It was just like, whenever I thought about it, I'd be like, 'No, no, I can't do that. I don't want to have to go there.'"

But his wife was very encouraging, and life with his two preschoolers and a fulltime job was already intense enough, so, he says, "sanity prevailed".



"It was probably in the peak of when you've got young kids, and you've got shitty nappies everywhere, and, you know, your life is basically hell. My wife was saying, 'I never want to have another child. I was like, 'Yeah, I don't want to have another child either'.

While still anxious about the procedure, he says the desire to guarantee they would have no more children, and the convenience of [never having to worry about contraception](#) again, meant he finally summoned up the courage to book himself in.

"I decided I was just going to have to man up and so I did the whole *Braveheart* sort of thing and I showed up and I thought, 'Yeah, this is going well'. And then the guy before me staggered out, and he had this look of real distress on his face."

Once in the room, though, the vasectomist put Hamilton at ease. She told him to look at the ceiling and covered his groin area with what he describes as a "ball sheet". They conversed about rugby: "It was like casual lunch conversation", he says.

During the operation, he says, there was no pain, "except you can feel the sort of the pulling and the jerking", and then "quite quickly" it was all done.

He drove himself home. Apart from a dull ache after the anaesthetic wore off, there was no pain. It was not at all like getting kicked in the nads.

**V**ery few vasectomies fail – the success rate is well over 99% – but if post-vasectomy pregnancy occurs, there are typically three main reasons, says Dr Luke Wee of specialist Auckland vasectomy practice The Cooper Clinic.



Dr Luke Wee, of The Cooper Clinic. Photo / Dean Purcell

"For some people, there can still be persistent sperm, despite efforts to clear them, and then there's a second possibility where the tubes could rejoin within the first three months. The third possibility is whether the vasectomy wasn't quite cut in the right place."

While the chances of something going wrong are extremely low, Wee says one recurring concern among men is about the possible impact on sexual performance. However, there is no link between vasectomy and sexual dysfunction.

"If there is [sexual dysfunction](#)," he says, "it could be because of pre-existing conditions or pre-existing relationship or psychological challenges."

The Cooper Clinic won't give vasectomies to anyone under 21 but Wee says he strives to ensure patients of all ages are fully informed about whether vasectomy is the right option for them: "Because regret can be one of the psychological complications of vasectomy, and we don't talk a lot about it."

However, he also says that technological advances mean that "the concept of vasectomy being permanent is gradually becoming obsolete", with advanced techniques meaning sperm can sometimes be extracted without the need for a vasectomy reversal.

"There's a lot of emotions that come into that countdown to the day of the vasectomy, where some people can be confused, they could be uncertain: Is it truly what I want? They'll be double-checking with their partners. They'll be challenging themselves. Is there something else that I can be pursuing?"

"People come with mixed emotions. So I think that counselling around fertility preservation or fertility restoration options is becoming an important part of that conversation."

**J**on Holmes had his vasectomy in February this year when his second child was 10 months old.

"I probably just wanted to give it a little bit of time to go 'we're definitely happy with that', or is there a little bit of the seed that's saying maybe we could have a third child? But 10 months in, with [having two kids](#), we were definitely sure that was enough for us."





Jon Holmes with wife Kate and children Jossy (left) and Leo.

On exposing his genitals in front of a stranger, he says: "My philosophy was, this woman has seen so many penises all day long, I don't even think she looks at it. I think you probably think that whoever it is on the other side is completely judging you and is thinking about what your cock looks like. But, quite honestly, I wasn't that concerned. They've seen it all before. I mean, when I saw the list of how many she was doing that day, I was like, 'Okay'."



Prior to the operation, he received an injection of local anaesthetic, which he describes as feeling like "someone's grabbing your testicle and giving it a little mild squeeze", but that lasted about two seconds and was, he says, "really not an issue".

After that, the whole thing was over in what he estimates was three or four minutes. "It was super quick, super easy. And really, apart from when the anaesthetic went in, after that there was really no pain at all. I didn't feel a thing."

Afterwards, he says, there was nothing more than a dull ache, which lasted a few days, and then things were back to normal.

"I was surprised at how you can just walk in there, have a vasectomy and walk out again as if literally nothing has happened. It feels really like nothing has happened.

"I was very surprised how quick it was, I was very surprised at how quick the recovery was... I definitely thought it was far more of a procedure than it really is."



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