

SEXUAL FUNCTION AFTER TENSION-FREE VAGINAL TAPE (TVT) FOR STRESS INCONTINENCE: RESULTS OF A MAILED QUESTIONNAIRE

Hypothesis / aims of study

The tension-free vaginal tape (TVT) is a relatively new procedure to correct urinary stress incontinence. Studies on the effect of vaginal surgery for benign conditions on sexual function are rare. Sexual dysfunction after vaginal surgery may be due to the relation of the female urethra and the clitoris. It is intended that sexuality would improve after TVT, particularly among those patients who had either dyspareunia or leakage during intercourse. However it is also possible that TVT could be detrimental to sexual activity due to surgical damage. This retrospective study was undertaken to assess the effect on sexual function of TVT procedures for stress urinary incontinence.

Study design, materials and methods

In a retrospective study we evaluated sexual function after tension-free vaginal tape (TVT) for urinary stress incontinence based on responses to a mailed questionnaire 3-12 month after operation. Patients with a pelvic organ prolapse who needed more extensive surgical treatment were excluded.

In the absence of an accepted sexual function index for women with incontinence we evaluated our patients with the questionnaire developed by Lemack et al

Results

From 1999 to 2002, a sexual function questionnaire was mailed to 128 women, and partners, who underwent a TVT procedure for genuine urinary stress incontinence, without pelvic organ prolapse or detrusor instability.

The questionnaire was returned by 96 women (75%), 69 (72%) reported being sexual active. Four sexual active patients were excluded, two had no partner before, and another had no partner after TVT operation. One patient sent an incomplete questionnaire. Mean appreciation or frequency of intercourse of the 65 sexual active patients did not change. Overall, 26% described improved intercourse compared to preop. Only one patient described worsening of intercourse after TVT operation because of increase of incontinence.

Interpretation of results

Improvement often resulted from cessation of urinary incontinence. It is clear that in studies like these, improvement in incontinence and local surgical damage - as potential opposing aspects - need to be addressed separately in its effect on sexual function. It may be difficult to distinguish the impact of these two factors

Concluding message

Overall, in this study the technique of tension-free vaginal tape as such seems to have no negative impact on sexual function. Moreover because of its successful outcome on incontinence, it has a positive overall effect on sexual function. In relation to urogynaecological surgery, like TVT, prospective studies need to be done with validated global sexual function questionnaires.