

MidLife Matters – Surgical menopausal delay procedure – February 4, 2020

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There's a new procedure available to women that promises to delay menopause, but experts are warning women to remain cautious.

Late last year, a British company, ProFam, began offering a private surgical procedure to women under the age of 40. This surgery is marketed as way to postpone menopause by 5 to 20 years. Possible advertised benefits include: (1) improving menopausal symptoms like hot flashes, mood changes and poor sleep; (2) decreasing the risk of heart attack or osteoporosis (weakened bones); and (3) possibly increasing a woman's chance of having a baby later in life.

The treatment is quoted to cost the equivalent of \$5000 to \$20,000 Canadian dollars. Initially, a small part of one ovary is removed by making small cuts in the abdomen and retrieving it under visualization with a camera. The collected tissue is then frozen and preserved. Later, tissue is re-implanted back into the body. The intention is for this grafted tissue to make and replace the hormones that have declined because of menopause. The re-implanted ovary pieces can be placed back near the fallopian tube or in the armpit.

For the purpose of helping with menopause, only 11 women in the world have had this procedure so far. However, the procedure is not completely new. It has been used in a greater number of young women who are at risk of loss of ovary function due to cancer treatment. The primary goal in these women is to help with fertility. In these younger women, the re-implanted graft has been shown to successfully increase hormones in the body and lead to successful pregnancy. How long the re-implanted ovary tissue continues to function has been variable in this group.

Many fertility experts and menopausal organization have expressed concern about this offered "menopausal delay" surgery, because it is still experimental when used for the purpose of helping menopause. Some of the expressed concerns include:

- Compared to treatment of menopause with medications, surgical procedures tend to have added risks.
- There is little information and not enough testing about the long term safety or effectiveness of this procedure for menopausal treatment.
- The impact of removing a part of ovary on the long term function of the ovary is unknown.
- The risk of ovarian cancer and breast cancer as well as the need for birth control is unknown if ovarian tissue is reimplanted.

The idea of this procedure could be promising for women with medically or surgically caused menopause. However, to attempt to delay menopause in the average healthy woman is not recommended yet because of the lack of information. Existing hormone therapy or other more well established and well researched options remain a woman's best treatment choice for now.

Resources:

<https://thebms.org.uk/2019/08/new-medical-procedure-could-delay-menopause-by-twenty-years-bms-response/>

<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-51269237>

<http://www.profam.co.uk/>