



Women's Health For Life, Inc.
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What is Colposcopy?

Colposcopy is an exam used to diagnose abnormal problems of the cervix or vagina (mouth of the womb) with problems like abnormal pap smears, dysplasia and warts. It cannot be done when you are on your period. Your cervix has a transformation zone, which simply means the cells are transformed from one type to another during your lifetime. Because these cells are constantly changing, viral changes from Human Papilloma Virus, for example, find it easier to affect that area of your body. Pap smears are a screening test for cervical dysplasia or pre-cancerous changes to your cervix. The colposcopy will help to determine if there is a reason for concern. An abnormal pap smear does not mean you have cervical cancer, but it needs to be followed up so you do not develop cervical cancer.

How is it done?

Just like your pelvic exam. You are on the exam table in the pelvic position. The doctor puts the speculum into your vagina and then will wash away any discharge with a vinegar solution.

The doctor will then look at the cervix or vagina with the colposcope. It is an instrument like a microscope mounted on a stand. It magnifies so the doctor can see in much greater detail any problem area. This exam takes about 20 minutes. If the doctor sees an area that looks suspicious, a biopsy may be necessary and can be done in the office at the time of your exam.

What is a Biopsy?

The doctor uses a special instrument to remove a tiny bit of tissue from the cervix or vagina. Sometimes this is a little uncomfortable and a pinching sensation may be felt.

The tissue is then sent to the lab for examination by a specialist. You will be given a follow-up appointment to come back after the biopsy to discuss the findings and recommended plan of care.

If you are under 18 years of age, bring your parent or legal guardian with you. Do not douche for 48 hours before your appointment. The doctor will talk to you further on that day. If you would like, you may take ibuprofen 400 mg (Aleve or Advil) one hour prior to your scheduled appointment time. We recommend taking it for discomfort because a biopsy may be done.

Post Procedure Care

Avoid intercourse, douches, and tampons for 2 weeks. Take showers, not baths, until vaginal discharge stops. A brown/black vaginal discharge is common following the use of Monsel's solution during the procedure. Call the office if fever, pelvic pain, or significant vaginal bleeding occurs.

Abnormal Pap Smear

An abnormal pap smear can be very alarming. If recommended, it is important to have further testing to be sure there is no cancer or pre-cancer present. An abnormal pap could be an early warning sign of cervical cancer, but many other conditions can also cause a pap to be abnormal.

Causes of an Abnormal Pap Smear

- Cervical cancer
- Precursor to cervical cancer
- Glandular cell abnormalities
- Human Papilloma Virus
- Hormonal Status – menopause, pregnancy, hormone replacement therapy, oral contraceptives
- Infection – Trichomonas, yeast, shift in vaginal flora – coccobacilli, herpes simplex virus, Actinomyces species, others
- Inflammation
- Atrophic vaginitis – low estrogen state
- Radiation changes
- Intrauterine contraceptive device
- Pregnancy

Cervical Precancer – Cervical Intraepithelial Neoplasm/CIN

“new/changing cell growth on the outside of the cervix”

Grades of CIN:

CIN I – low grade dysplasia (“cellular changes”)

CIN II – moderate grade dysplasia

CIN III – high grade dysplasia

CIS – carcinoma in situ (“cancer in the tissue that has not invaded surrounding tissues”)

Normal-----CIN I-----CINII/III-----CIS-----Cancer

ASCUS- Atypical cells can fall anywhere from normal to CIN III

Don't smoke

No more partners with HPV risks

HPV Vaccination options= Gardasil to help prevent recurrence and persistence of HPV.



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AGUS Pap Smear

Atypical glandular cells of undetermined significance or AGUS. There is an abnormality in the cells that make mucus (glandular cells) but we are not sure if it means anything (undetermined significance).

Glandular cells make up the vaginal and cervical mucus and the lining of the uterus. The lining builds each month then sheds with your menstrual period. These cells are found in the entire reproductive organs including your cervix, fallopian tubes and ovaries. When any type of "atypical" cells are noted on a pap smear, more extensive evaluation should be done to find the source of the problem.

Any one or more of the following procedures may be recommended by the doctor:

Colposcopy is one type of procedure that is done with an "abnormal" pap smear. The doctor looks at your cervix with a microscope that is on a stand. Sometimes vinegar may be put on the cervix. This helps the doctor see any abnormal areas with the microscope. Depending on what the doctor sees, biopsies may be needed. Sometimes they will also do an endocervical curettage. This is done by an instrument the doctor will use that takes a scraping of cells from inside the cervix. This can be done in the office.

An endometrial biopsy is done by the doctor using a small, flexible, plastic catheter that is inserted through the cervix into the uterus. This catheter will collect cells from the uterine lining to be sent to the lab to be looked at. This can be done in the office.

An ultrasound may be recommended to look at your ovaries, uterus, fallopian tubes to check for any abnormalities. It is usually done with a vaginal probe. This can be done in the office.