

Colposcopy

A colposcopy is a procedure where the cervix, vagina or vulva are examined under magnification with a colposcope. A colposcope is a magnifying instrument within a light source and looks similar to a pair of binoculars. The colposcope does not touch you or go inside you, it just allows the practitioner to see any abnormalities.

Why do I need a colposcopy?

Colposcopy is recommended to follow up abnormal cervical screening tests and/or to review changes on the cervix, vagina or vulva. A colposcopy may also be recommended if a woman experiences certain symptoms, such as abnormal vaginal bleeding.

How long does it take to have a colposcopy?

A colposcopy typically takes 5-10 minutes, however the whole appointment usually lasts about 30 minutes. You may also have to wait before being seen.

Preparing for a colposcopy

Before your appointment, do not place any creams or pessaries in your vagina. It is preferable that women are NOT menstruating when they have a colposcopy. If possible, you should try to make your appointment when you think you will not be having your period.

What happens during the procedure?

For a colposcopy to take place, a speculum is inserted into the vagina. A speculum is a device used to hold the walls of the vagina apart so that the cervix and vagina can be seen. The cervix is then examined using the colposcope and the doctor will dab your cervix with acetic acid (a vinegar-like solution) or an iodine solution to help them see any abnormal cells more clearly. Any abnormal cells will show up as a different colour. The doctor may decide to do a biopsy during the colposcopy and will discuss this with you at the time. A biopsy involves taking a small sample of tissue to provide additional information on any cell changes that might be present. This tissue is then sent to the laboratory and examined under a microscope. The speculum is then removed and the examination is complete.

Is colposcopy a painful procedure?

A small number of women experience a slight tingling sensation when the acetic acid is applied to the cervix. Some women may experience mild cramping if a biopsy is taken. This settles quickly.

After colposcopy

1. Most women are able to return to regular activities straight away after having a colposcopy. Some women will experience mild pain or cramping, but this usually settles within 1-2 hours.
2. If you have a biopsy of your cervix, you may experience a small amount of vaginal bleeding after the procedure and brownish or dark discharge is normal for the first few days.
3. Do not put anything in your vagina (creams, douches, tampons) and do not have vaginal sex for 7 days after having a biopsy.

See your healthcare provider if you experience any of the following:

- heavy vaginal bleeding (soaking pads within 1-2 hours)
- vaginal bleeding for more than 7 days
- unpleasant smelling vaginal discharge
- pelvic pain or cramping that continues more than a few days
- fevers or chills

When will the results of my colposcopy be available?

The results of the colposcopy will be available from the clinic where you have had the colposcopy. We will advise you how to get these results at the time of your colposcopy. The clinic will also advise you about any additional follow up care.

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References

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Medline Plus (2016) Colposcopy Directed Biopsy
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003913.htm>