

What will Happen During my Colposcopy Examination

What is Colposcopy?

Colposcopy is an outpatient procedure in which a special microscope (colposcope) is used to look at the neck of the womb (cervix) and vagina. It does not go inside you. For most women this is a painless examination but some may find it slightly uncomfortable.

Colposcopy may not be able to be performed if you are having a period and are at the heavy time of your period. If this is the case, please re-schedule your appointment.

Why do I Need Colposcopy?

The usual reason for this type of examination is due to an abnormal smear test, but other reasons may be due to your General Practitioner (GP) requesting a closer examination of your cervix due to its appearance, or you have had some bleeding that needs to be investigated further, or you have a persistent heavy discharge.

What happens when you come for your appointment?

General Points

- You are welcome to bring someone with you, as some people feel dizzy or faint following the procedure. Depending on the current visiting restrictions they may be asked to wait outside.
- You may wish to wear a loose-fitting skirt to avoid removing all of your lower clothing during the examination, or bring your own dressing gown. A cover will be provided.
- Some women have a slight discharge or bleeding after the examination. You may want to bring a sanitary pad with you.

Visitors

There may be a visiting doctor, nurse or medical student in the clinic for training purposes and your permission is needed for them to stay while you are being examined. As we are a training unit you may be seen by a trainee colposcopist who will be under supervision.

Seeing the Colposcopist

You will be asked specific background questions, including the date of the first day of your last menstrual period and the type of contraception you use. When your last cervical screening test was performed. Explanations about the reason for your consultation will be given, and what the examination will involve.

Examination

- You will lie on a special couch with your legs supported. The examination itself takes about 15 minutes, but the overall clinic visit may take a little longer. If you wish you can watch the procedure on a TV screen by your side.

- The first part of the examination is very much like having a smear test, with a speculum being inserted into your vagina. It should be no more uncomfortable.
A nurse will be present throughout to assist you as much as you need. However, if you have found smear-taking painful or difficult, please let the colposcopist know at the start.
- A solution of mild vinegar is washed over the cervix, which may sting. This makes abnormal areas appear white. In some cases we may take a photograph of the area for our records.

Tests

- If your examination shows no abnormalities then we discharge you.
- In some cases it may be necessary to obtain vaginal swabs and to test for the presence of chlamydia to ensure that it is not an infection that is causing your symptoms. You will be informed if these are required. We will only contact you and your GP if these swabs show an infection, so that they can commence any treatment or refer you to a specialist department (if necessary).
- In some cases we may take some small biopsies (these are samples of tissue approximately 2mms in size, which are taken quickly with only momentary discomfort). If a biopsy is taken, you may have a light, blood-stained discharge for a few days. It is advisable to refrain from sexual intercourse for up to three to four days to allow the biopsy site to heal. We will write directly to you and your GP within three to four weeks of your appointment to inform you of the results and if any follow up is required.

Potential Treatment for Bleeding / Heavy Discharge

In some cases, we may suggest that you proceed to treatment to your cervix if your symptoms are due to a natural finding on your cervix called an erosion or ectopy. This occurs when the fragile cells from within your birth canal have migrated out onto the surface of your cervix. These cells are more delicate and can bleed easily on contact. If you would like to proceed to treatment we will need to take a biopsy of the area first and bring you back on another day for treatment which can either be in the form of:

- Cautery – this is where heat is used to destroy the area to encourage the cells to regrow stronger.
- Cryotherapy – this is where extreme cold is used.

We will provide you will a more detailed information leaflet if you would like to proceed with treatment. The type of treatment performed will depend on the area seen or clinician's preference.

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