

Colposcopy

Colposcopy is viewing the cervix, vagina, and external genitals using magnification and a bright light. Using this combination, your clinician is able to examine these areas in closer detail, and differentiate between what is normal and abnormal. This technique can detect abnormal tissue that may be pre-cancerous at a very early stage, when chances for cure are the greatest. Proper diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up care are most often very effective in cancer prevention.

Why should I have Colposcopy?

Your clinician may suggest you have a Colposcopy for a number of reasons. These include:

- **To evaluate the report of an atypical or abnormal Pap smear.** Your Pap smear may have been reported as atypical or abnormal even though your cervix looked normal at the time of your exam. The Pap smear screens for changes in cervical tissue caused by active infection by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). The abnormal cellular changes, known as dysplasia, can potentially be precancerous.
- **To evaluate a cervical lesion or polyp.** During a pelvic exam, your health clinician may see an unusual tissue growth on your cervix. This tissue change could be due to a benign condition such as a polyp or irritation. However, the tissue change could be evidence of active infection from Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).
- **If you have been exposed to diethylstilbestrol (DES).** DES was a drug given to women during the 1940's to the 1960's to prevent miscarriages. It is now believed that the daughters of these women have greater risk of developing certain cervical and vaginal changes associated with a rare form of cancer. Colposcopy is recommended at regular intervals for women with a history of DES exposure.

What will happen during Colposcopy?

When scheduling a colposcopy, your clinician may recommend taking an over-the-counter pain medication approximately 30-60 minutes prior to the procedure. Colposcopy is done in the clinician's office with an instrument called a colposcope. The colposcope itself will not come in contact with your body at any time, nor will it cause any discomfort. A diluted vinegar solution will be applied to the surface of the vulvar, vaginal and cervical tissue during the exam. With the use of vinegar, atypical or abnormal appearing tissue will appear as white areas that will be seen by the examining colposcopist. Biopsy of abnormal tissue identified during the inspection process may be recommended

During a biopsy, one or two very small samples of tissue, about the size of the tip of a ballpoint pen, will be taken from the white or any other abnormal appearing area. You may not feel any discomfort, or you may feel a mild to moderate sharp cramp. The discomfort will not persist after the biopsy is done. The tissue samples will then be sent to a lab for further evaluation.

What can I expect following Colposcopy?

A plan for future care is very important following colposcopy. If no biopsy is done, a plan for follow up should be formulated before you leave your clinician's office. Follow up may include repeat Pap smear or colposcopy, HPV DNA testing, or another procedure, depending on your specific condition.

If a biopsy is done at the time of your colposcopy, your clinician will likely advise a follow up appointment to discuss the biopsy results and options for your individual care.

Possible complications of the colposcopy include bleeding and infection, which are rare. Contact your clinician if you have any bleeding, increasing pain, or fevers.

If your need is urgent, and the student health service is closed, go to the nearest hospital emergency department or call 911 for an ambulance.

Colposcopy Instructions

Prior to your appointment:

- Colposcopy cannot be performed accurately during the time of your menstrual period. Therefore,

- please determine when your period will be and schedule your appointment appropriately.
- If needed, contact your insurance company to assure payment of procedure.

On the day of your appointment:

- Eat a good breakfast, (e.g. cereal, juice, toast).
- Take two Advil® (or Tylenol® if you cannot tolerate Advil) one hour prior to your appointment in order to reduce cramping.