

Colposcopy



Colposcopy Clinic
Women and Children's Directorate

Why do I need a Colposcopy?

You have been referred for one of the following reasons:

- You had three unsatisfactory smears, or
- Your recent smear test result was abnormal or positive.

This means that small changes may have been found in cells which make up the skin of the neck of the womb (cervix).

We must investigate all cervical cell changes, no matter how small. Please be reassured that, if necessary, we can easily treat them. Occasionally you may have been referred for an examination, even if your smears have been normal, because of symptoms like bleeding after sex.

What is Colposcopy?

Colposcopy is where a doctor examines the cervix using a special type of microscope called a colposcope. It looks like a large pair of binoculars on a stand. It does not go inside you.

What happens at the first visit to the Colposcopy Clinic?

It is a good idea to get to the clinic a few minutes early so that you are not rushed and feel you can take your time.

You may bring your partner, a relative or a friend with you.

It is a good idea to write down any questions beforehand. We have left space at the end of this leaflet for this.

The doctor may offer to carry out treatment of your cervix at your first clinic visit.

Before the examination:

Before the colposcopy examination, the doctor will ask you some medical details. They will explain about any investigations or treatments.

They will ask you to go into the changing area to remove your tights and underwear below the waist. You may find it helpful to wear a skirt to the clinic.

We will ask you to lie down on a couch and we will cover your lower half with a towel.

To make it more comfortable for you and so that the doctor can see your cervix easily, we will support your legs in special leg rests. The nurse will be beside you all the time and they or the doctor will explain everything as they examine you.

The examination

First, just like when you had your smear taken, the doctor will insert a special tube called a speculum into the vagina so that they can look at your cervix.

They may repeat your cervical smear and take a swab to check for any infection before having a closer look at your cervix through a colposcope.

To be able to see any abnormal area clearly, the doctor will apply a special solution to the cervix.

Then, if you wish, you will be able to see your cervix on a TV screen.

The nurse or the doctor may be able to point out any areas of small changes to you. Some women like to see this and others don't. Please let us know what you want. The whole examination will take approximately 10 minutes.

Biopsy

As well as having a closer look at your cervix, the doctor may take a very small sample (a biopsy) from any affected area in your cervix.

You should only feel a slight discomfort for a few moments. The biopsy will be sent to the laboratory for a detailed check.

The results may take a few weeks.

After the results, we will send you the result and another follow up appointment.

What might a biopsy show?

The result from a biopsy will confirm the degree of cell changes.

If you have already had treatment it will confirm that this was appropriate.

If you have not had treatment it will help the doctor to decide what treatment, if any, will be best.

What about the treatment?

If you do need treatment, the doctor will discuss the options with you.

Treatment usually takes place at an outpatient appointment.

Will I feel anything?

You may feel slight discomfort but it should not be painful.

There might be a slight burning smell as we remove the abnormal cells and the whole procedure should only take 5 – 10 minutes.

The nurse will be with you to help you relax. If you wish, they will explain what is going on.

You may want to bring a partner, relative or friend to the Colposcopy Clinic on the day you come for treatment.

What about after treatment?

You should be fit to drive and return to work within one or two days after your treatment. If your job is particularly heavy, you might have to take some extra time off.

You may have a period like pain for a short time.

You will also have a watery or blood stained discharge for 3 - 4 weeks until the treatment area on the cervix heals.

Use sanitary towels rather than tampons until it stops to reduce the risk of infection and allow the area to heal. If you have any heavy bleeding you should contact your GP or the clinic for advice.

Women react very differently to treatment. Some feel tired, others carry on as normal. Both reactions are normal.

We do have a rest area where you can relax after treatment before you go home. It is a good idea to take things easy for a few hours. If need be, take a couple of painkillers.

What about sex?

The doctor will advise you not to have sex for about 4 weeks. After that your sex life should be completely unaffected. You should also know that treatment of an abnormal cervical smear will not affect the possibility of you becoming pregnant.

Will there be any follow up visits?

You may need to visit the colposcopy clinic for one or more follow up visits. This will depend on the results of any tests that are carried out. This is so that the doctor can check all abnormal cells have healed. They will also take a smear test at this time.

If all is well we will refer you back to your GP, Well Woman Clinic or Family Planning Clinic for more regular smears over a period of time. This will give you peace of mind.

Treatment is 95% effective.

This means that most women are cured by treatment but a few women will need more treatment. We recommend that you attend all smear test appointments.

If you have any questions or worries about the colposcopy or treatment, please let us know.

Information about cervical cancer and colposcopy is also available online www.jostrust.org.uk

5 Top Tips for a Healthy Lifestyle

Evidence has shown that there are things that we can do or choices that we can make that will reduce our risk of many long term conditions and help us to live healthier lives.

1. Stopping Smoking

Research found that around 7% of cervical cancers in the UK are caused by smoking. Smoking is the single most preventable cause of ill health and early death in the U.K. Stopping smoking will also help your body clear the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) which is the main cause of cervical cancer.

For information to help you quit call the Smokeline on 0800 848484 or visit www.nhs.gov.uk/smokefree or www.canstopsmoking.com

2. Sexual Health Check

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection is the cause of most cervical changes, you can reduce your risk of picking up new HPV types by using condoms with new sexual partners. Free condoms are available, please see: www.freecondomsglasgowandclyde.org.

Occasionally cervical abnormalities can be a sign of other infections. If you have not had a recent sexual health screen please ask your doctor or visit any Sandyford sexual health clinic. www.sandyford.org.

3. Healthy Eating

Making healthy food choices and maintaining a healthy weight throughout life, can lower your risk of developing a range of chronic diseases. Snack on fresh fruit and vegetables instead of high fat or sugary snacks.

4. Physical Activity

Exercise has many health benefits. Being active helps maintain a healthy weight. It may also boost your immune system.

Take at least 30 minutes of exercise five times a week. You can split this into 3 times 10 minute slots.

5. Alcohol

Women should not regularly drink more than 2-3 units per day, and have 2 alcohol free days a week.

For further information please go to: www.takelifeon.co.uk

Questions:

Use this space to write down any questions you would like to ask the nurse or doctor.

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