

About Your Colposcopy

What to expect

Your healthcare provider has advised you to have a colposcopy exam because you had an abnormal Pap smear. This handout tells you what to expect during and after this procedure.

What is a colposcopy?

A *colposcopy* is an exam of your *cervix* (the lower, narrow part of the uterus). The exam is done using a special magnifying tool called a *colposcope*.

This exam will help your provider find the cause of your abnormal Pap smear.



What can I expect?

Before your colposcopy, your provider will apply a vinegar solution to your cervix. This makes problem areas easier to see. Your provider may also apply iodine to help abnormal tissues show more clearly.

During your colposcopy, your provider will use a special magnifying tool to examine your cervix.

If your colposcopy includes a *biopsy*, your provider will take small samples of tissue and scrapings of cells from the inside of your cervix. This scraping is called *endocervical curettage*. The tissue sample will be sent to the lab for testing.

You may have cramping during the procedure. For most women, this cramping goes away soon after the procedure is over.

What can I expect after the procedure?

If your colposcopy included a biopsy, do **not** place anything in your vagina for 1 week. This includes no sexual intercourse, tampons, diaphragm, or douching.

Vaginal Bleeding and Spotting

After a biopsy, it is normal to have some vaginal bleeding. This bleeding may be light spotting with brown or black discharge or moderate bleeding.

You may also pass dark grainy material. This is from the solution used to stop bleeding after a biopsy. This is normal.

When to call: If you have a lot of bleeding, please call the clinic.

Pain

It is normal to have some cramping for a day. For relief, you may take ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil, Nuprin, or other brands), 200 mg or 400 mg every 6 hours.

When to call: If you have bad pain, please call the clinic.

Infection

An infection may take several days to develop.

When to call: If you have a heavy discharge that smells bad, please call the clinic.

Biopsy Results

- We will contact you with results in 1 to 2 weeks with your results. If you do not hear from us by the 3rd week after your colposcopy, please call the clinic and ask for your colposcopy biopsy results. Phone numbers for the clinics are in the “Questions” box on this page.
- If your biopsy results show:
 - Mildly abnormal cells (*atypia* or *mild dysplasia*), you will not need treatment unless your condition continues or gets worse. We will let you know when to have a follow-up Pap smear or *human Papillomavirus* (HPV) test.
 - *Severe dysplasia*, your provider will contact you and talk with you about your care plan.

Follow-up

Remember, colposcopy is not a treatment. It only helps your provider find out why you had an abnormal Pap smear.

Your provider may advise you to have treatment or more tests. It is very important to follow your provider’s advice to help prevent cervical cancer.

Questions?

Your questions are important. Call your doctor or healthcare provider if you have questions or concerns.

- Women’s Clinic at Harborview:
206.744.3367
- Women’s Health Care Center at UWMC-Roosevelt: 206.598.5500