Pap tests and women over 50

What is a Pap test?
The Pap test is a simple test used to check for changes to the cells of the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer.

Cervical cancer is one of the few cancers that can largely be prevented. Regular Pap tests can prevent up to 90 per cent of cervical cancers. All women between the ages of 18 and 70 who have ever been sexually active should have a Pap test every two years.

Most Pap test results are normal. A small number show changes in the cells of the cervix. Most of these changes are minor infections. These can be easily treated or clear up naturally. In a very small number of cases, the changes may go on to become cervical cancer if not treated. This is why having a Pap test every two years is so important.

Age and cervical cancer
Many women over the age of 50 think they are unlikely to develop cancer. In fact, women over 50 are more likely to develop cervical cancer than younger women. The risk of getting cervical cancer goes up with age.

Women who have been with the same partner for years, are divorced, or widowed, still need to have regular Pap tests.

Women who have reached menopause should keep having Pap tests every two years until the age of 70.

Some women who have had a hysterectomy still need regular Pap tests. Check with your doctor if you’re not sure.

Please turn over...
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Facts and figures
- In 2008 42% of Victorian women diagnosed with cervical cancer were over 50 years of age.
- In 2007, 208 women in Australia died from cervical cancer.

For more information about Pap tests contact your local doctor or health service, visit papscreen.org.au or call the Cancer Council on 13 11 20.

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