

Information

The colposcopy

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a close examination of the cervix and vagina. It uses an instrument called a colposcope. The doctor checks the cervix for any unusual changes to the cells.

Who needs a colposcopy?

Women who have:

- a high-grade abnormality on a Pap test result
- several low-grade abnormalities
- bleeding after sexual intercourse.

How does a colposcopy differ from a Pap test?

A Pap test is a simple screening test that checks for changes to the cells of the cervix. A colposcopy allows the doctor to have a closer look at the cervix to see if treatment is required. It usually takes about 10 minutes.

How is a colposcopy done?

You will be asked to undress from the waist down and sit in a chair with leg supports.

Once you are comfortable, the doctor will put a speculum into the vagina, like a Pap test. The doctor will paint the cervix with a solution to highlight any abnormal areas, and then place the colposcope at the entrance of the vagina. The colposcope itself does not enter the body. The doctor will look through the colposcope to carefully examine the cervix. If abnormal cells are visible, the doctor may perform a biopsy.

What is a biopsy?

During a biopsy, the doctor takes a sample of abnormal cell tissue from the surface of the cervix. Biopsies are not usually painful, but you may have some discomfort. The samples are sent to a laboratory. It takes up to two weeks for results to come back to your doctor.

When your results come back, your doctor will recommend one of the following:

- treatment
- a repeat colposcopy at a later date
- more frequent Pap tests
- no further action.

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What should I do after a biopsy?

You may have some discomfort for a short time after a biopsy, often similar to period pain. You should avoid heavy physical exercise, sexual intercourse, swimming, bathing and spas for 24–48 hours after the biopsy. Having a shower is fine. These precautions are to lower the risk of bleeding or infection. You should wear a sanitary pad after the procedure as there may be some spot bleeding for a few days.

What do I need to do before a colposcopy?

Doctors prefer not to do a colposcopy when a woman has her period. Some women have cramping (similar to period pain) during the colposcopy. It may help to take a painkiller, paracetamol or an anti-inflammatory normally used for period pain an hour before the colposcopy.

How much does a colposcopy cost?

This depends on how your doctor bills. Some of it will be reimbursed by Medicare. Please ask about the cost when you make the appointment.

For more information about colposcopies or to order the booklet *Pap test results: For women with an abnormal Pap test* visit papscreen.org.au or call the Cancer Council on 13 11 20.

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