



# Colposcopy

## What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure to examine the cervix, vagina or vulva to look for changed or abnormal cells.

A colposcope is a special microscope that magnifies the cells of your cervix, vulva or vagina.

## Who needs a colposcopy?

You might need a colposcopy if you have:

- abnormal results from a cervical screening test
- unusual or unexplained bleeding from your vagina
- an abnormal lump or growth on your cervix, vagina or vulva.

## Before a colposcopy

Before you have a colposcopy, please note:

- you must tell the doctor if you have any allergies, especially to iodine
- you must tell the doctor if you are (or may be) pregnant
- you will need to reschedule if you have your period on the day of your appointment.

## What happens during a colposcopy?

A colposcopy takes about 15 to 20 minutes. The doctor will explain the procedure before they start. When you are ready, the doctor will:

- ask you to take off your clothes from the waist down and sit on the examination bed with your legs on the rests and your waist covered by a sheet
- insert a plastic or metal instrument (speculum) into your vagina – this opens your vaginal walls so your cervix can be seen
- position the colposcope between your legs (it doesn't go into the vagina)
- apply a fluid (acetic acid, iodine or both) to the cervix to highlight where the abnormal cells are
- look through the colposcope to see your cervix, the pattern of abnormal cells and where they are located
- take a small sample of cells (biopsy) for testing if needed.

## Is a colposcopy painful?

Most women don't experience any pain during a colposcopy, although there may be some discomfort from having the speculum inside your vagina. Try to relax so the doctor can see your cervix more easily.

If the doctor takes a sample of cells (biopsy), you may have some mild period-like cramps afterwards. You can take some over-the-counter paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief if required.

## What happens after a colposcopy?

You should be able to do normal activities after a colposcopy.

It's normal to have some light bleeding (spotting) for at least two days after the procedure, especially if you had a biopsy.

The fluid used during the procedure may also change the colour of your discharge for one to two days. It's a good idea to use a sanitary pad after the procedure.

If you had a biopsy, avoid swimming, baths and spas for two weeks. It's okay to have showers. Also don't use tampons or have vaginal sex for two weeks. This will reduce the risk of bleeding or infection.

If you have concerning symptoms after your colposcopy, call the clinic to speak to a nurse or doctor.

## Follow-up plan

After the procedure your doctor will discuss how it went and the follow-up plan. If you had a biopsy, it may take up to two weeks to receive the results.



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Disclaimer: This information does not replace medical advice. If you are worried about your health, talk to your doctor or healthcare team.

We write health information for people with diverse backgrounds, experiences and identities. We use the term 'women', but we acknowledge that this term is not inclusive of all people who may use our content.

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