

North Carolina Women's Hospital
ABOUT YOUR COLPOSCOPY
“cul-poss-co-pee”

Why do I need a colposcopy?

You need a colposcopy because your pap smear showed some abnormal cells. The pap smear is only a screening test. An abnormal result does not mean that you have cancer. It does mean that your healthcare provider needs to examine your cervix with a special microscope, to look for abnormal areas on your cervix. If abnormal areas ([dysplasia](#)) are seen, then additional tests will need to be done to understand more about those areas. If the additional tests also show abnormal cells, then some treatment may be needed to prevent cancer from developing in the future.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure that allows your provider to look carefully at your cervix (the lowest part of your uterus or womb). It is much like the pelvic exam when you have a pap smear. During the exam, your provider will use a special microscope, called a colposcope, to look at areas of your cervix that may have caused your pap smear to be abnormal. The colposcope looks like binoculars on a stand with a light.

What happens during a colposcopy?

You will be helped into the same position that you are in when you have a pap smear. A speculum will be placed into the vagina so that your cervix can be seen. Your provider may decide to do a repeat pap smear before starting the colposcopy procedure. During the colposcopy, a cotton swab will be used to apply a clear vinegar solution to your cervix. If there are any areas with abnormal cells, the vinegar solution will cause them to turn white. This makes it easier for your provider to examine these areas more closely with the colposcope. The colposcope will not touch your body. .

How will I feel during the colposcopy?

During the colposcopy most women feel no discomfort. Some women say the vinegar solution stings slightly.

What if your health care provider sees abnormal cells?

If your provider sees white areas on your cervix after the vinegar solution is applied, a long thin tool will be used to remove a small sample of cells from those areas. This test is called a biopsy. The sample is about the size of the tip of a ball point pen.

How will I feel during the biopsy?

If you need a biopsy, you will be awake and you will feel pressure that is not painful. Sometimes, a biopsy is needed of cells from inside the cervix. If cells are removed from inside the cervix, some women report sharp cramping that lasts for about 10 seconds. Most women feel little or no discomfort after their biopsy but some women report mild cramping that lasts for a few minutes.

How do I prepare for a colposcopy?

Do not have sex or use anything in the vagina for 24 hours before your appointment. If you are having heavy bleeding with your monthly period, please call (919) 966-1195 to make another appointment. Light bleeding is not a problem. You may eat before coming to the clinic. You may take ibuprofen (Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®), before you come to the clinic unless you are allergic to these medicines or your health care provider or nurse told you not to take them.

How should I take care of myself after the colposcopy and biopsy?

- ❖ After you have your colposcopy you should feel just fine. There is nothing special you should do to take care of yourself. If you also had a biopsy, you should wear a small sanitary pad for the first few days. You may notice some dark specks and brown discharge on your pads. This comes from medications your health care provider put on your cervix. Any shade of brown or red on the pad is normal if it is not heavy bleeding. To help your cervix heal, do not have sex or put anything into your vagina, like tampons or creams, for one week. It is safe to shower or take a tub bath.
- ❖ If you have some uncomfortable cramping, you can take ibuprofen (Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®) if you are not allergic to them.
- ❖ You can expect a watery, clearish-yellow discharge that smells like fish afterwards.

When should I call my health care provider?

Problems after cervical biopsy are very rare. However, if you have any of the following symptoms, you should call your health care provider:

- ❖ Bleeding so heavy that you are soaking one pad every hour
- ❖ A temperature of 100 degrees F (or 38 degrees C) or higher
- ❖ Severe pain not relieved by ibuprofen (Motrin®) or acetaminophen (Tylenol®)

During the day on Mondays through Fridays, call our clinic at (919) 966-7822 to talk with the advice nurse about your symptoms.

If the clinic is closed, call (919) 966-4131 and ask for the “gynecology resident on call” to discuss your concerns.

How do I find out about the results of my tests?

You should know your biopsy results within 14 days. We will send you and your usual health care provider or clinic a letter with information about your tests and if you need follow-up care. If you have not heard about the results by 3 weeks after your visit, call the Gynecology office at (919) 966-1195.