

About Your Abnormal Pap Smear



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What does a Pap smear check for?

A Pap smear is done to check cells that are scraped off the outer layer of your cervix (the opening to your womb). The cells are checked to see if they look the way they should (normal) or if they show any changes (abnormal) that may be a sign of problems with your cervix. Cells from your cervix that are abnormal are called cervical dysplasia.

Dysplasia is **not** cancer. It is a pre-cancerous change in the cells of your cervix.



What does an abnormal Pap smear mean?

An abnormal Pap smear could be a sign of a little problem, or it could mean that there is a big problem, such as cancer. Most times, an abnormal Pap smear does not mean you have cancer. Often, your health care provider will want to do other tests to find out more about the abnormal cells from your cervix.

Your abnormal Pap smear results could show:

- Small changes that should be carefully watched.
- Dysplasia (pre-cancer) that could grow into cancer.
- Cancer.



When pre-cancers are found and treated early, they most often do not grow into cancer.

What will be done about my abnormal Pap smear?

One test that is often done to find out the cause of the abnormal cells is called a Colposcopy. In this test, your health care provider will look very carefully at your cervix, using a strong light and a microscope. Your health care provider will also take a sample (biopsy) of the most abnormal cells, if any are seen. These will be checked in the lab and your health care provider will get a report. A colposcopy can be safely done even if you are pregnant.

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Many times, your health care provider will do cryosurgery or a Loop Electrical Excision Procedure (LEEP) right after doing the colposcopy. Cryosurgery means that the abnormal cells on your cervix will be frozen. If you have had cryosurgery, you will have a watery vaginal discharge. In a LEEP, the abnormal cells will be taken out. If you have had a LEEP, you will have some vaginal bleeding and a watery discharge.

What other tests may be needed?

Sometimes, your health care provider will want to do more tests. These may be a Cone Biopsy or a LEEP.

- In a Cone Biopsy, a small, cone-shaped sample of your cervix from the area where the abnormal cells are, is taken out. This procedure is done in the Operating Room while you are asleep. If you have had a Cone Biopsy, you will have some vaginal bleeding and a watery discharge after the test.
- In a LEEP, a loop-shaped instrument is used to take out the part of your cervix that has the abnormal cells. This procedure can be done in your health care provider's clinic or office. If you have had a LEEP, you will have some vaginal bleeding and a watery discharge after the procedure.

What if I have a pre-cancer or a cancer?

If your tests show that you have a pre-cancer or a cancer, **and** if you do not plan to have any more children, you and your health care provider may choose a hysterectomy as the best treatment for you. During this surgery, your womb (uterus) and your cervix will be taken out.

What about care after I have been treated?

It is very important that you keep having Pap smears and check-ups as often as your health care provider tells you. This way, your cervical problem can be carefully watched so it does not get worse. Also, your health care provider can watch for, and treat any new problems that may come up.

