



Gynecological Exam

What to expect during a routine gynecological exam.

Whether this is a first gynecological exam or a routine appointment, here is what can be expected.

After completing all required paperwork (e.g., Medical History Form), the patient will be escorted to an exam room. A nurse will check vitals (e.g., blood pressure and pulse), measure height and weight, and review the completed medical questionnaire.

Once the clinician has entered the room he/she will perform a general exam that includes listening to the heart and lungs, feeling the thyroid gland, checking the breasts, and checking abdominal organs. The clinician may also demonstrate how to perform a self-breast exam if the patient is not familiar with this procedure. In addition, a pelvic exam is usually performed.

After the exam, the clinician will answer any questions. Results from the exam may not be available immediately. In most cases the patient will be notified by letter of pap smear results.

Who should get a gynecological exam?

Unless you have a medical problem, you can wait to make an appointment for your first well-woman visit when you turn 21. After your first pelvic exam, your doctor will tell you when you need to come back. It'll depend on your medical history and whether you have any health issues. Women who wish to use a prescription method of contraception should also have routine gynecological exams.

What is a pelvic exam?

A pelvic exam is used to examine the external and internal genitalia. During the pelvic exam an instrument called the speculum is inserted into the vagina allowing for the examination of the vaginal walls and cervix. Although this procedure may be uncomfortable, it shouldn't cause pain. After the speculum is inserted, necessary tests will be performed (e.g., Pap Smear). The clinician will also feel the size and shape of the uterus, ovaries, fallopian tubes, and other internal organs by inserting one or two of his/her fingers into the patient's vagina and/or anus.

What is a pap smear?

How is a colposcopy performed?

What should I expect during a routine gynecological exam?

What is a pap smear?

A pap smear is a test used to determine if there are any pre-cancerous or cancerous cells on the cervix. During this procedure, a small bristle brush or swab is used to scrape a small amount of cells from the area inside and around the cervix. The cells are then examined under a microscope. Abnormal cells can be caused by a number of factors including a Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection.

Important Tips

Following these simple tips can help increase the accuracy of pap smear test results:

- Do not douche or use vaginal medication two days before the exam
 - Do not use a tampon one day before the exam
 - Do not have intercourse one day before the exam
 - Do not schedule an exam when menstruation is in progress; light flow is okay
- Note: The optimum time to have an exam is between 10 and 20 days after the first day of the last menstrual cycle
- Do not withhold information about medical history and sexual activity

What is HPV?

HPV is one of the most common viral sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) among college students today. Certain types of HPV can cause warts on the hands or feet, while others can cause genital warts. This virus may also be asymptomatic or show no visible signs of the infection. Therefore, it is not uncommon for an individual to be unaware that he/she is infected with the virus. Although there is no cure, symptoms can be treated. HPV infections can cause abnormal cells, some precancerous, to appear on the cervix. Nearly all cases of cervical cancer cases are a result of an HPV infection.

Did you know?

A vaccine is available to protect females from the four types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers and genital warts. It is recommended for girls and women age 9 through 26.

When a woman has an abnormal pap smear or if her cervix, vagina, or vulva (“lips” or opening of the vagina) appears abnormal, a colposcopy is usually ordered. This procedure is similar to a pelvic exam, however a biopsy (small tissue sample) may also be performed. Although this procedure may cause some discomfort and light bleeding, it generally poses no health risks.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a microscopic examination used to diagnose abnormalities of the cervix, vagina, and/or vulva.

How is a colposcopy performed?

The procedure for a colposcopy usually takes 20 - 30 minutes and is similar to that of a regular pelvic exam. However, a colposcope (special microscope with a light on the end) is used to obtain a closer look inside the vagina and at the cervix.

- While reclining on an examination table (as if for a pelvic exam) a speculum is inserted into the vagina so that the cervix is exposed.
- A colposcope is then placed at the opening of the vagina.
Note: This instrument is not inserted into the vagina at any time.
- Once the vagina is open, the health care provider looks into the vagina so he/she can locate any problem areas.
- A stain or other chemical agent may be used to improve the visualization.
- After the health care provider locates the problem areas, he/she can determine the extent and possibly the cause of the abnormalities.
- Results of a visual examination are available immediately. However, if a biopsy is performed results will not be available for at least five days.

What is the post procedure care?

The procedure used to perform a colposcopy is not very invasive, however it may cause some discomfort. A pain reliever may be prescribed before or after the procedure. It is best to ask the health care provider what kind of medicine (pain reliever) should be taken as well as how much and how often. If a biopsy is performed, cramping and light bleeding may also be experienced. If any unexplained vaginal bleeding or swelling is experienced after a biopsy, contact the health care provider immediately.

References

- www.cdc.gov (Centers for Disease Control)
- www.plannedparenthood.org (Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Inc.)
- www.familydoctor.org (America Academy of Family Physicians)
- www.4women.gov (Department of Health and Human Services)



