

Colposcopy

What Is A Colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a common gynaecological procedure that allows a specialist to closely examine the cervix, vagina, and vulva for signs of disease. It is typically recommended if you have had an abnormal cervical screening result, also known as a smear test. This factsheet provides detailed information about the procedure, what to expect, and the benefits of colposcopy.

Why You Might Need A Colposcopy

A colposcopy is often recommended if your cervical screening test has shown abnormal results. Abnormal cells on the cervix, known as cervical dysplasia, do not necessarily mean cancer, but they could develop into cancer if not monitored or treated. A colposcopy helps to identify the extent and severity of these changes.

Other reasons for needing a colposcopy might include:

- Unexplained bleeding (during or after sex, between periods, or after menopause)
- A cervix that looks unusual during a routine pelvic exam
- Persistent vaginal discharge

What Happens During A Colposcopy

The procedure is usually carried out by your gynaecologist in an outpatient clinic setting. It typically takes about 10 to 20 minutes and is similar to having a smear test.

- **Preparation:** You will be asked to lie on an examination couch, with your legs supported by rests. If you can't get into that position, you may be examined lying on your side with your knees drawn up. A speculum is gently inserted into the vagina to keep it open, allowing a clear view of the cervix.
- **Examination:** A colposcope, which is a magnifying instrument with a light, is positioned just outside the vaginal opening. It does not enter your body but provides a magnified view of the cervix and surrounding areas. The specialist may apply a mild solution to your cervix to highlight any abnormal areas.
- **Biopsy:** If the specialist identifies any abnormal areas, they may take a small sample of tissue, known as a biopsy, for further analysis. This might cause a slight pinch or cramping sensation, but it should not be painful.
- **Treatment:** Sometimes you may be treated at the time of colposcopy using Loop excision of the transformation zone (LETZ) or cone biopsy.. Alternatively, you may be asked to wait for the results of your biopsy before treatment.

After The Procedure

Following a colposcopy, you may experience light bleeding or spotting for a few days, especially if a biopsy was taken. Mild cramping is also common. It is advisable to avoid using tampons, having sexual intercourse, or swimming for a short period as recommended by your healthcare provider to reduce the risk of infection.

Results from a colposcopy are typically available within a few weeks. Your gynaecologist will discuss the findings with you and recommend any necessary follow-up or treatment.

Risks And Benefits Of Colposcopy

A colposcopy is a safe and effective way to diagnose potential issues with the cervix, vagina, and vulva. The benefits of early detection and treatment of abnormal cells far outweigh the minimal risks associated with the procedure. Potential risks include:

- Discomfort during the procedure
- Light bleeding or spotting
- Infection (rare)

By identifying abnormal cells early, a colposcopy can prevent the development of cervical cancer, providing peace of mind and better long-term health outcomes.

How To Prepare For Your Colposcopy

To make your colposcopy as comfortable as possible, consider the following tips:

- **Food and drink:** You may eat and drink as normal before your appointment.
- **Schedule wisely:** Try to schedule your colposcopy when you are not on your period, as this can make the examination easier and more comfortable. Make a note of when you had your last period.
- **Take a pain reliever:** Taking an over-the-counter pain reliever about 30 minutes before the procedure can help reduce discomfort.
- **Avoid vaginal products:** Do not use tampons, vaginal creams, or have intercourse for at least 24 hours before your appointment. If you have a coil fitted, do not have intercourse for at least 7 days prior to colposcopy in case your coil needs to be removed.
- **Medication:** Bring a list of your medications to your appointment and let your gynaecologist know about your medical history or any allergies.
- **Remove jewellery below the waist:** If you need treatment during the procedure, you will be asked to remove belly button or vaginal piercings.
- **Support:** You can bring someone with you in case you're not feeling well after the appointment.
- **Driving:** Most people can drive home afterwards but check with your gynaecologist whether you

are fit to do so. This is for car insurance purposes.

When To Seek Medical Advice

While complications from a colposcopy are rare, you should contact your healthcare provider if you experience any of the following after the procedure:

- Heavy bleeding (more than your usual period)
- Severe abdominal pain
- Unusual or foul-smelling discharge
- Fever or chills

These symptoms could indicate an infection or other complication requiring prompt medical attention.

Why Choose Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic For Colposcopy?

At **Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic**, we provide expert, compassionate care for colposcopy procedures, using state-of-the-art facilities to ensure accurate and early detection of cervical abnormalities. Our skilled specialists are dedicated to making your experience as comfortable and reassuring as possible, guiding you through each step with personalised attention and support. By choosing our clinic, you're taking a proactive approach to maintaining your gynaecological health with the highest standard of care.

Contact Us

If you have any concerns or questions about colposcopy, don't hesitate to reach out to Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic. Our dedicated team is here to offer the guidance and care you need. Contact us today to schedule your appointment or to discuss any concerns you may have.