

Colposcopy

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a close examination of the cervix and vagina using a colposcope (microscope) to identify any abnormalities.

Who can benefit from a colposcopy?

Women who have had abnormal test results following their cervical smear may need to undergo a colposcopy. This type of procedure can identify any irregularities or changes that have been found during the smear which could possibly – but very rarely – lead to cervical cancer.

Procedure

Similar to a smear test, you will need to lie back on a special chair and place your legs apart in supports, or 'stirrups'. A speculum is inserted into the vagina and acetic acid (a vinegar solution) smeared onto your cervix using a swab. The solution turns any abnormal cells white. Iodine is then used to identify the area of abnormal cells, turning any irregularities yellow and staining the normal cells black. The cervix is then closely examined using the colposcope, which is done externally. If any abnormalities are found, a small biopsy (tissue sample) may be taken for testing.

Recovery

You will be told by your doctor if any abnormalities are present, and what he or she thinks these may be. If a biopsy has been taken, you will need to wait for the results, which may take up to two weeks. You will be able to leave hospital following the procedure, and should avoid inserting anything into your vagina for at least one week (i.e. tampons and sexual intercourse). If further treatment is needed your doctor will talk you through this during your follow-up consultation.

Risks

There is a very small risk of infection following the colposcopy and the chance of heavy bleeding. Symptoms include a thick discharge and/or unpleasant odor. However it is normal to experience light bleeding and discharge for a few days following the procedure if a biopsy has been taken. You should inform your doctor if you experience severe stomach pain.