



X-Plain Colposcopy Reference Summary

Introduction

A colposcopy is a very safe procedure. It lets your gynecologist get a close look at the cervix.

This patient education reference summary will help you better understand this procedure, its indications, and possible risks and complications.

Anatomy

The female reproductive organs include:

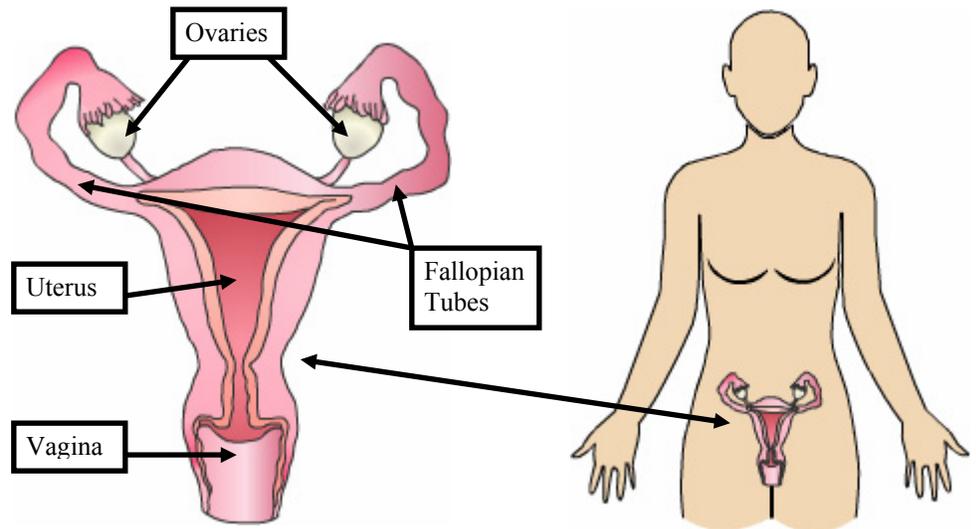
- the vagina
- the uterus
- the fallopian tubes
- the ovaries

The female reproductive organs are located in the pelvis, between the urinary bladder and the rectum.

The ovaries have 2 main functions.

- The production of hormones, such as estrogen and progesterone.
- The release of eggs from the ovaries, called ovulation.

The hormones that the ovaries produce help to regulate ovulation. They also prepare the inner lining of the uterus for pregnancy. When an egg is released, it travels to the uterus through the fallopian tube. If an egg does not get fertilized, the egg and the inner lining of the uterus are discharged to the outside of the body during the menstrual period.



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The lowest part of the uterus is the cervix. It opens into the vagina, which opens to the outside of the body between the urethra (the urinary bladder opening) and the rectum.

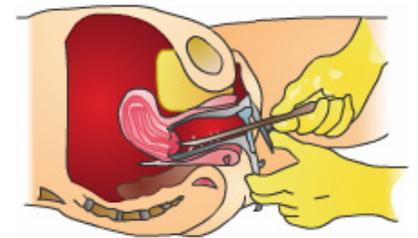
The cervix comes in contact with sperm during unprotected sex, which makes the cervix vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases. Some of these diseases are linked to the development of cervical cancer.

Cervical Cancer

Cancer can affect the cervix. Some sexually transmitted viral infections can lead to cervical cancer. A vaccine is now available to prevent some of the viral infections that can cause cervical cancer.

Make sure to ask your healthcare provider about that vaccine! When cervical cancer is found and treated early, it can be cured. Your gynecologist can perform a test called a Pap smear; this helps find cervical cancer early.

For a Pap smear, the gynecologist swabs cells from the cervix and smears them on a glass slide. The slide is then sent to a pathologist. The pathologist looks at the cells under a microscope and is able to identify infections, cancer, or changes in the cells that could lead to cancer.



After a Pap smear, your gynecologist may decide to take a closer look at the cervix by doing a colposcopy.

Colposcopy

A colposcopy is an outpatient procedure, which means the patient goes home when the procedure is done. A colposcopy should not be scheduled during a menstrual period because the blood could make it difficult for the gynecologist to see inside the body.

During a colposcopy, the patient lies down on the examination table with her legs bent and spread apart. The gynecologist inserts a speculum into the vagina to hold it open during the procedure. This is not painful but can sometimes be uncomfortable. You should tell your doctor if you feel pain or discomfort. The gynecologist uses a microscope and a powerful light to look at the cervix.



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If the doctor finds an abnormal spot, he or she may remove the whole thing or just a piece of it. The removed tissue will be sent to a pathologist to be tested.

During a colposcopy, the gynecologist may use a laser to burn off abnormal areas. He or she may also use an instrument called a loop to remove tissue. If there are no obvious abnormalities on the outer part of the cervix, the doctor may scrape the inside of the cervix to find out if there are abnormalities that cannot be seen.

A colposcopy is not painful but may be uncomfortable. Most women can continue with their daily routine after a colposcopy. Depending on how much tissue is removed, the doctor may ask that for several days or weeks, the patient refrain from:

- vigorous exercise
- heavy lifting
- sexual intercourse
- using tampons

Risks & Complications

A colposcopy is a very safe procedure. However, like other procedures, it has some risks and complications. These complications are very rare but include:

- infection
- bleeding, either during or after the procedure

A colposcopy may need to be repeated on a regular basis if abnormal areas were found.

After The Procedure

After a colposcopy, the doctor may apply a special paste on the affected area that will help it heal faster. This may cause a thick brownish-black discharge from the vagina for a few days.

Women who undergo a colposcopy can expect some cramping and bleeding for 2-3 days after the procedure; any bleeding should not be heavy. If you experience severe bleeding, foul-smelling vaginal discharge, fever, severe abdominal pain, or any other unusual symptoms, you should call your doctor.

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Summary

A colposcopy is a safe procedure. It can help your gynecologist diagnose and treat common cervical problems. As you have learned, complications may occur.

Knowing about them will help you detect them early. With the help of a colposcopy, your doctor may be able to detect cervical abnormalities and treat them early, giving you the best chance for a successful cure!



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