

Colposcopy...



Making sense of an abnormal Pap smear

What is a 'colposcopy'?

A colposcopy is the use of a specialised microscopy instrument used to provide a magnified examination of the cervix. It is an accurate way of examining the cervix for any unusual changes to the cells.

Why is colposcopy performed?

Colposcopy might be performed for several reasons:

- A high-grade abnormality has been discovered on a Pap test result
- A number of Pap tests have shown continuing low-grade abnormalities
- There has been persistent bleeding after sexual intercourse.

How is a colposcopy performed?

You will be asked to undress from the waist down and sit in a chair with leg supports. When you're comfortable, a speculum is passed into the vagina to allow a view of the cervix. A fluid solution will be painted over the cervix – this solution smells like vinegar and it is used to highlight any abnormal areas. The colposcope is placed about 15 to 20 cm from the vagina, and does not enter the body. Looking through the colposcope allows a magnified view, and if abnormal cells are visible a biopsy might be taken.

A biopsy is a small sample of abnormal cell tissue from the surface of the cervix. Having a biopsy taken is not usually painful, but you may have some brief discomfort. The samples are sent to a laboratory for analysis by the pathologist. The results of a biopsy will be discussed with you. If a biopsy is taken, there may be some discomfort for a short time, similar to period pain. You should avoid heavy physical exercise, sexual intercourse, swimming, bathing, and spas for 24–48 hours after the biopsy. Having a shower is safe and will not cause any problems.

