

LLETZ Procedure



Treating abnormal cells on the cervix

What is a LLETZ procedure?

LLETZ stands for 'Long Loop Excision of the Transformation Zone.' It is a procedure performed to remove abnormal pre-cancerous cells from the surface of the cervix (the 'transformation zone') before cancer occurs. To do this, a loop of wire (the 'long loop') is connected to an energy supply to shave off the cells:



How is a LLETZ procedure performed?

In preparation for the LLETZ, you will undress the lower half of your body only, then lie back on a procedure couch and cover with a sheet. Once comfortable, the procedure is performed by placing a speculum into the vagina. This will be similar to when you had your smear test. A solution will be applied to your cervix - this helps to identify abnormal areas.

Before starting the procedure, local anaesthetic will be used to numb your cervix, similar to that used by a dentist. Insertion of the anaesthetic can be uncomfortable, but the discomfort does not last long. You can experience an increased heart rate – this is a normal response. As part of our preparation, a sticky pad is placed on the leg. This is needed as part of the equipment for the heated wire loop of the LLETZ.

Once the local anaesthetic has worked and the cervix is numb, the affected area is removed by shaving it off using the heated wire loop. This does not hurt, but there may be a vague feeling of pressure. If there is any bleeding following the excision further cautery may be used to control it. The procedure will take about ten to 15 minutes.

After the procedure

LLETZ procedures commonly are performed in the afternoon, and it is probably best not return to work on the day of treatment. You should be able to resume normal activities the following day. There is typically a discharge related to healing for two or three weeks.

During healing it is best to use sanitary pads rather than tampons, not have intercourse, and not swim or have a bath - shower only during this time.



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Are there any risks?

All medical procedures carry risk. It is important to understand that the procedure is being performed to prevent cancer of the cervix occurring. Cancer of the cervix is a very serious disease and the Pap smear screening program, colposcopy procedures, and use of LLETZ are all very effective in reducing the chance of cancer of the cervix.

The balance of risk clearly favours the LLETZ procedure, but still there are risks associated with having LLETZ treatment:

Risks in the short term

- There is a small chance that the treatment site may become infected. This is uncommon, and usually presents with either increasing bleeding or development of an offensive (smelly) vaginal discharge. Infection is obviously important to treat, and may require antibiotics.
- There is a chance that the LLETZ treatment may not remove all of the abnormal cells. If this is the case you will be monitored more closely over the following months and years.

Risks in the longer term

- The cervix can become scarred and narrowed from the treatment. This is more common after two or more treatments. Having a single LLETZ treatment does not significantly affect your ability to conceive – and allowing cancer of the cervix to occur by not having treatment is a much more serious threat to fertility.
- There is a very small increase to your risk of pre-term labour (delivering a baby earlier than the expected due date). To put things in perspective, this is about one in 100. However, again the risk of developing cervical cancer without treatment far outweighs this.

Key points...

- The purpose of cervical screening is to reduce the risk of developing cancer of the cervix. Cancer of the cervix is a very serious condition, leading to surgery that can cause permanent infertility.
- By participating in the screening program, pre-cancerous abnormalities can be identified early and treated before causing long-term harm.
- Virtually all of the procedures involved – having a Pap smear, colposcopy if the Pap is not reassuring, and using LLETZ when abnormal cells are found – are relatively simple outpatient treatments that carry low risks, and are very well tolerated by most women.