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The “Not-So-Scary- Pap-Smear” Guide



Figure 1: Photo from www.cosmopolitan.com

A simplistic guide to answer the basic questions about the dreaded Pap smear.

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What is a Pap Smear

- Pap smear stands for Papanicolaou (named after the scientist guy that discovered it)
- It is a screening test to check for cervical cancer
 - Screening test= a tool use to detect something
 - Cervix=the opening to your uterus

Why?

- Detects pre-cervical cancer before it is too late (it is easy to treat if it is caught early)

When do I need to have this done?

(Guidelines from the American Academy of Obstetrics & Gynecology)

- Start at age 21
- Then continue as follows:
 - 21-29 yrs old
 - every 2 years
 - > 30 yrs
 - every 3 years
 - >65-70
 - no longer needed if your last 3 tests were normal & you haven't had a bad test in 10 yrs

- Exceptions*
 - HIV infection
 - Previous history of cervical cancer
 - Immune suppressed
 - DES exposure

*please contact your provider for more info.

*****Important even if you are NOT due for a Pap smear, it is still important to get a pelvic exam *****

How can I prepare for my appointment?

- Schedule your appt. when you don't have your period
- Don't be afraid to ask questions before, during, or after
- Remember it is an important part of your health, even if it isn't the most fun thing to go through
- Remember to breath during your exam to make is less uncomfortable

*****IMPORTANT: If you're ever uncomfortable during any part of your exam, please tell your provider*****

Go to www.ACOG.org for more info.

What to expect:

- You'll be asked to undress from the waist down, put a gown on, and place a drape over your lap
- You will be asked to lay down on the table and place your feet into stirrups (similar to mini foot rests) so that you can let your knees relax and fall to the sides (it is normal to feel weird at first). See Fig. 2.



Figure 3 Photo from University of Chicago Medical Center

- You may be asked to scoot farther down, so your butt feels like it is almost falling off the table
- You may be asked to allow your legs to fall farther to the sides
- The provider will lift the courtesy drape to examine the outside of your vagina and pubic area
- A metal device called a speculum will be slowly placed into your vagina and slowly opened. See Fig. 3.
 - The vagina is normally closed

- The speculum keeps your vagina open so your provider can see deep inside where your cervix sits



Figure 2 Photo from www.fotosearch.com

- TIP: to make the speculum insertion less uncomfortable try your best to relax by remembering to breathe. Sometimes closing your eyes and thinking about something else helps.
- A cervical brush is passed through the speculum. See Fig 4

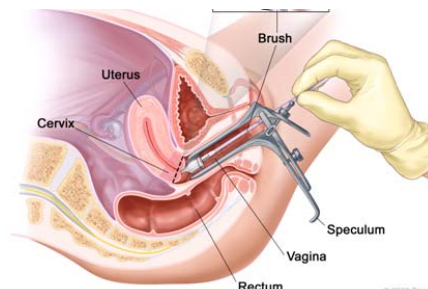


Figure 4 Photo from University of Chicago Medical Center

- The cervical brush is rubbed against the the cervix to collect cells See Fig. 5

- Cells are looked at under the microscope by a person trained to detect abnormalities (i.e. the scary stuff)
- The speculum is removed
- Your exam is done!!!!
- Your provider will call you with the results of your test

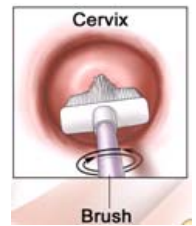


Figure 5 Photo from University of Chicago Medical Center

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~ My next pelvic exam:

...is on: _____

...with: _____

~ My next Pap smear

...is on _____

...with _____

~ If I have questions I call:

~ I can find out my results by calling:

-Cut Here

ACOG Practice Bulletin no. 109: Cervical cytology screening. ACOG Committee on Practice Bulletins—Gynecology Obstet Gynecol. 2009;114(6):1409.