

This handout explains what a colposcopy is, what to expect during and after the procedure, and when to get help.

What is a colposcopy?

If your Pap test showed something abnormal, your care team may recommend a colposcopy.

A colposcopy is a procedure that uses a special light to check your cervix (the lower, narrow part of your uterus) for changes. If we see anything that looks different, we may take a small sample (called a biopsy) to send to the lab.

What should I expect during the procedure?

We understand that medical procedures involving the vaginal area can sometimes feel vulnerable. This explains what to expect so you can feel as comfortable and informed as possible.

1. **Privacy and preparation:** After we step out of the room, you'll remove your clothing from the waist down. We'll provide a sheet to cover your lap. When you're ready, we'll return and check in with you before beginning.
2. **Positioning during the procedure:** We'll ask you to lie on your back on the exam table with your knees bent and feet supported—similar to a pelvic exam. We'll guide you through each step and check in as needed.
3. **Using the speculum:** We'll gently insert a speculum into your vagina. This tool helps us see your cervix clearly. If anything feels uncomfortable, please let us know right away.
4. **Applying the solution:** We'll gently use a cotton swab to put a vinegar solution on your cervix. This helps us see any areas that might need a closer look. You might feel a mild tingling or burning sensation for a minute or two. Sometimes we also use iodine to help us see the tissue more clearly.
5. **Examining with the colposcope:** We'll use a magnifying tool called a colposcope, which shines a bright light, to closely look at your cervix. The colposcope stays outside your body.
6. **Taking a biopsy (if needed):** If we need to take a biopsy, we'll first numb the area. Then we'll gently use a small instrument to collect a sample of cells and apply a solution to reduce bleeding. We'll explain each step before we begin.

What should I expect during the procedure, continued

7. **Finishing the procedure:** Once the procedure is complete, we'll carefully remove the speculum. We'll offer you a menstrual pad to wear home in case of light bleeding.

You may feel some cramping during or afterwards, but most people find it goes away quickly. If you have any questions or need support at any point, please let us know. We're here to help you feel safe and cared for.

What should I expect after the procedure?

We want you to feel informed and supported as you recover. Here's what to do and what to expect after the procedure, especially if you had a biopsy.

Give your body time to heal

- Avoid putting anything in your vagina for 1 week (7 days). This means **no**:
 - Sexual intercourse
 - Tampons or menstrual cups
 - Diaphragms
 - Douching

Expect some discomfort

- You may feel mild cramping in your uterus (your lower belly). You can use a heating pad or take over-the-counter pain medication. Ask your provider which medications are best for you to take.

Expect some bleeding or discharge

- You might notice:
 - Light vaginal bleeding or spotting for up to 2 days after the procedure.
 - Dark, grainy discharge. This is normal and comes from the solution that is used to reduce bleeding after a biopsy.
- Use pads instead of tampons or a menstrual cup until the bleeding stops.

Getting your biopsy results

- Your biopsy results usually take about 1 week or more.
- Your health care provider will contact you to explain the results and talk about any next steps.

When to get help

Call your care team if you experience:

- Heavy vaginal bleeding (needing to change a pad more than once an hour)
- Foul-smelling vaginal discharge
- Vaginal bleeding for longer than 2 days after your procedure
- Severe lower belly pain
- Any new or worsening pain or cramping
- Fever and/or chills
 - Temperature taken by mouth at or above 100.4 °F (38 °C)
 - Temperature taken under the arm at or above 99.5 °F (37.5 °C)
- Concerns that can't wait until your follow-up visit