

# Colposcopy and treatment for abnormal cervical smears

## What is Colposcopy?

Colposcopy is a detailed examination of the cervix (neck of the womb). A colposcope is a special magnifying instrument which allows the doctor or specialist nurse to get a clear view of the cells of the cervix. Sometimes the vagina and the vulva (the folds of skin outside the vagina) are examined at the same time.

A colposcopy is carried out as an outpatient procedure by a doctor or specially trained nurse. The procedure should not cause you any pain or discomfort.

## Why do I need a Colposcopy?

A colposcopy is usually done because you have recently had an abnormal cervical smear result which needs further investigation. Generally an abnormal smear test indicates changes in cells on the cervix. Although abnormal cells rarely turn out to be too serious, some changes may develop into cancer if not treated.

A colposcopy allows the doctor or specialist nurse to have a more detailed look at the abnormal cells on the cervix and sometimes to carry out treatment.

## What happens at the colposcopy clinic?

You are welcome to bring someone with you who can be present when you see the colposcopist if you wish. As the clinician may suggest giving you some treatment at your visit we advise you to bring someone with you who can drive you home.

You may find that a loose fitting skirt or long top and trousers are most convenient. Please bring a sanitary pad with you as you may have some vaginal discharge / spotting blood after the colposcopy.

### **Visiting clinical staff**

This is a teaching hospital and there may be a visiting doctor, nurse or a medical student in the clinic. We will ask for your permission for them to stay while you are being examined, and will respect your decision if you do not wish them to be present.

### **Before the colposcopy**

The colposcopist will ask you some background questions, explain the reason for the examination, and tell you what the examination will involve. A female nurse will be present at all times to help you as much as you need.

### **During the colposcopy**

The first part of the examination is very much like having a smear test and should not be uncomfortable. However, if you have found smear taking painful or difficult in the past, please let the colposcopist know.

You will be asked to lie on your back on a special couch which has supports for your legs. As with a smear test, an instrument (speculum) is gently inserted into the vagina and the doctor looks through the colposcope which magnifies the view of your cervix. The colposcopist can see pictures of your cervix on a screen and so you can also watch what's happening if you wish.

### **Investigations**

During the examination the colposcopist will apply various solutions to the cervix which will highlight any abnormal cells. This is not painful.

## Treatment

Some women will need to have treatment. We can usually, but not always, treat you in the colposcopy clinic under local anaesthetic and the colposcopist will decide with you which treatment is best for your situation – either Cold Coagulation or Diathermy Loop Excision.

The treatment most commonly used is Diathermy Loop Excision. The abnormal section of the cervix is removed and then sent for examination. This is very quick and effective and causes minimal discomfort. Most women say that it is much better than they had expected. Cold Coagulation destroys rather than removes the tissues. The instrument is placed on the cervix and left there for a short time to freeze / burn the abnormal cells. A biopsy will be taken from the cervix before Cold Coagulation is done.

Treatment permanently destroys the abnormality in over 90% of women, but it is important to have regular follow-up smears to confirm this.

## Follow-up

Before you leave the clinic the staff will answer any questions you may have. We will write to both you and your GP with any test results and follow-up arrangements within two to three weeks. If you do not receive this letter, or if you need your results earlier, please telephone the clinic. The first follow-up will usually be a smear with your General Practitioner or in the colposcopy smear clinic 6 months after your treatment.

## Some practical questions

### **What should I do if I have a period on the day of my colposcopy?**

Usually this is no problem, unless it is exceptionally heavy. If you feel particularly awkward about being examined with a period, please contact us.

What happens if I no longer have periods?

If you are past the menopause and are not on HRT, we will ask you to use some vaginal oestrogen cream for two weeks before your appointment. This will make the examination more comfortable for you and more accurate.

### **May I have intercourse in the week before my colposcopy?**

Yes.

### **Does a coil interfere with colposcopy treatment?**

A coil does not interfere with colposcopy. However, for certain procedures it may be necessary to remove the coil. So it is important to avoid intercourse for 7 days before your appointment or to use additional barrier methods. Please tell us as soon as possible if you have a coil.

### **What happens if I'm pregnant?**

You will still need a colposcopy appointment, but this will be planned according to your results and the expected date of delivery, or your last period.

Colposcopy and taking cervical smears can be undertaken quite safely during pregnancy, but any other investigations or treatments are usually postponed. If you are pregnant, please telephone us and we can plan your appointment accordingly.

### **Will colposcopy affect my fertility?**

Routine colposcopy and treatment have not been shown to affect your ability to get pregnant or give birth.

## How to contact us / Further information

There is continuous change and development within the cervical screening programme. More information can be obtained via websites or clinic staff.

Staff at the clinic are always happy to answer any questions you may have about your smear or colposcopy examination.

**Please contact us on:**

**Tel: (01865) 572110**

**Colposcopy Department**

**The Churchill Hospital**

**Old Road**

**Headington**

**Oxford OX3 7LJ**

You may also find helpful information on the following website

**[www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk)**

**We would welcome your suggestions and constructive comments on the information and service we provide.**

**Enclosure 3**

“If your first language is not English and you require an interpreter for your appointment, Language Line is a telephone line which provides instant access to interpreters. We can also book an interpreter to be present at your appointment. Please would you contact the colposcopy department if you wish to use this service”.