

Evelyn & Rose Women's Health

Colposcopy Patient Information Fact Sheet

This information sheet is designed to help you understand what a colposcopy is, why it has been recommended, and what to expect before and after the procedure.

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure that allows your doctor to examine the cervix, vagina and vulva using a special microscope called a *colposcope*. It is usually recommended after an abnormal cervical screening test (CST) or when you have symptoms such as unexpected bleeding.

The colposcope stays outside your body. The magnified view helps your doctor identify any areas of abnormal cells and decide whether any treatment or follow-up is needed.

Why have I been referred for a colposcopy?

- HPV detected on your cervical screening test (especially HPV 16 or 18).
- Abnormal cells seen on your CST (cytology).
- Persistent HPV infection over time.
- Bleeding after intercourse, or bleeding between periods.
- Changes seen on your cervix, vagina or vulva during an examination.
- Follow-up after previous treatment for abnormal cells.

Being referred for a colposcopy does **not** mean you have cancer. In most cases, abnormalities are mild and can be monitored or treated simply.

What happens during the procedure?

- You will be asked to lie on an examination couch, similar to when you have a Pap or CST.
- A speculum is gently inserted into the vagina so the cervix can be seen clearly.
- The doctor looks at the cervix through the colposcope (which stays outside your body).
- A mild solution (acetic acid) and sometimes iodine are applied to make abnormal areas easier to see.
- If an abnormal area is seen, a small tissue sample (biopsy) may be taken.

The procedure usually takes around 10–15 minutes. Most women are able to go home and resume normal daily activities afterward.

Does a colposcopy hurt?

Most women find the procedure similar to a cervical screening test. You may feel some pressure from the speculum. If a biopsy is taken, you may experience a brief cramp or sharp pinch. Light spotting for a day or two is common.

Is colposcopy safe in pregnancy?

Yes. Colposcopy is considered safe during pregnancy. Your doctor will take particular care. Biopsies are only taken when there is a strong concern about a high grade abnormality or cancer. Endocervical curettage (sampling from inside the cervix) is not performed in pregnancy.

How do I prepare for my appointment?

- If possible, book your appointment for a time when you are not having a period.
- Avoid intercourse, vaginal creams, pessaries or tampons for 24 hours before the procedure.

- You may take simple pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen beforehand if you wish, provided these are safe for you.
- Bring a panty liner to wear after the procedure, especially if a biopsy may be taken.

Aftercare and when to seek help

If no biopsy is taken, you can usually resume normal activities straight away. If a biopsy is taken, we recommend:

- Avoid intercourse, tampons, swimming, and baths for 48 hours (showers are fine).
- Use pads instead of tampons if you have spotting.
- Expect light bleeding or brown discharge for a day or two.

Contact the clinic or seek urgent medical attention if you experience:

- Heavy bleeding (soaking a pad in under an hour).
- Severe lower abdominal pain not relieved by simple pain relief.
- Fever or feeling unwell with flu-like symptoms.
- Foul-smelling vaginal discharge.

When will I get my results?

If a biopsy is taken, results usually take 1–2 weeks. Your specialist will contact you to discuss the findings and the recommended follow-up. This may include routine surveillance, repeat cervical screening, or treatment if higher grade changes are found.

Will colposcopy affect my fertility?

A diagnostic colposcopy and small cervical biopsies do **not** affect fertility. If treatment for high grade changes is required in the future, your doctor will discuss this with you in detail, including any potential impact on future pregnancies.

Contact details

If you have any questions before or after your colposcopy, please contact:

Evelyn & Rose Women's Health

Phone: 1300 076 732

This information is general in nature and does not replace individual medical advice. Please discuss your specific questions or concerns with your doctor.