



# Colposcopy (In Outpatient Clinics)

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## What is a colposcopy?

A **colposcopy** is a procedure where your provider uses a colposcope to look closely at your cervix, vagina, or vulva. A **colposcope** looks like binoculars mounted on a stand. It magnifies, or enlarges, what is seen so your provider can get a better look at the area.

## When is this procedure used?

It is used as a follow-up after these conditions:

- An abnormal Pap test (a test that finds abnormal cells on your cervix)
- Positive HPV test results (a test that shows you have human papillomavirus)
- If your provider notices any changes on your cervix or vagina and wants to get it checked out
- Unexplained bleeding from the vagina

## How do I prepare for my colposcopy?

### Before your appointment:

- If you take aspirin or another blood thinner medication, ask your provider if you should stop taking it before your colposcopy. These medications can increase your risk of bleeding.
- If it is possible that you may become pregnant before your colposcopy, use birth control or avoid any sexual activity that could cause pregnancy before your appointment.
- For at least 24 hours before your colposcopy, do not have vaginal sex, use vaginal medications, or douche (flush out or rinse your vagina).
- To manage any pain you might have during your colposcopy, you may take 400-600 milligrams (mg) of ibuprofen (Advil® or Motrin®) an hour before your appointment. If you can't take ibuprofen (because of a

medication allergy, stomach condition, or other reason), you can take 650-1000 mg of acetaminophen (Tylenol®). These medications are available over-the-counter (without a prescription).

- Eat something light before your appointment.
- Do not urinate (pee) right before you arrive, as you will need to give a urine sample for a pregnancy test.

**If you are having your period on the day of your colposcopy appointment:**

- If the bleeding is light or spotting, come to your procedure.
- If the bleeding is heavier, reschedule your appointment if possible.

**Once you arrive for your appointment:**

- On the day of your colposcopy, you will have a pregnancy test (unless you are in menopause). Tell your provider if you think you might be pregnant. They may recommend that you do not get a colposcopy if there is any chance that you could be pregnant at the time of your visit.

**What can I expect during the colposcopy?**

- You will get on an exam table, like you do for a pelvic exam. The provider will put a **speculum** (a device that holds your vagina open so they can look at your vagina and cervix) in your vagina.
- The provider may use a swab to put a small amount of vinegar on your cervix or vagina. This will help them see abnormal-appearing areas. This may cause a burning or tingling feeling.
- Your provider may remove a small piece of tissue (usually no bigger than the tip of a pen) from your body to send to the lab. This is called a **biopsy**. Sometimes they may collect more than one biopsy. You may feel some pressure or cramping during a biopsy of the cervix.
  - Your provider may inject some local anesthesia (numbing medication) before collecting a biopsy from the vulva or lower vagina.

- If they collect a biopsy, your provider may use a substance to stop any bleeding. It's normal for this substance to cause you to have some dark gray or brown discharge after your colposcopy.

### **What are the possible risks from this procedure?**

We work very hard to make sure your procedure is as safe and comfortable as possible. However, like all medical procedures, there are some risks you should be aware of.

Possible risks that can occur during, or in the days to weeks after, your colposcopy include:

- Heavy bleeding: Sometimes there is unexpectedly heavy bleeding after a biopsy. This is rare. If this happens, contact your provider.
- Infection: The risk of infection is less than 1 in 100 (less than 1% of patients). If this happens, we will help you treat the infection with antibiotics.

### **When will I go home after my colposcopy?**

Most people go home immediately after the procedure.

### **What are my care instructions at home after my colposcopy?**

- It is normal to have spotting blood or brown-colored discharge for up to 1 week after your colposcopy.
- You can shower and bathe normally after your colposcopy.
- You may begin normal physical activity immediately after your colposcopy.
- If you had a biopsy during your colposcopy, do not have vaginal sex, use tampons, use vaginal medications, or douche for 24 hours after the procedure.
- Most people can go back to work immediately after their colposcopy.

## When do I need to call my provider?

Call your provider right away if you have any of these signs and symptoms:

- A fever over 100.4° F (38° C)
- Heavy bleeding (you're soaking a regular pad in an hour or less)
- Severe pain in your stomach or pelvis that is not helped by pain medication
- Heavy vaginal discharge (spotting and light discharge are normal)

## How should I follow-up with my doctor after my colposcopy?

If your colposcopy included a biopsy, it is important that you understand how you will get the biopsy results and plan to follow-up with your provider. Please talk with your provider about this before you go home after the procedure.

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