

What is a colposcopy?

A colposcopy is a procedure which allows us a magnified view of the cervix, vagina, and vulval areas via a piece of equipment called a colposcope. A colposcope is a microscope which is mounted on a stand and connected to a powerful light. With this device and having a magnified view of the female genital structures, we are able to look for abnormalities that are not visible with the naked eye. The procedure is short and takes approximately 10-15 minutes. It is performed at the time of your consultation.

Why is a colposcopy performed?

Your doctor may have referred you for a colposcopy if on a routine Pap smear there were abnormalities noted. These can range from inflammation, infection, precancerous or cancerous changes in the cells of the cervix. It is important to remember that cancer is rare and most of the changes noted resolve spontaneously or simply require more vigilance. Occasionally further management is required.

What to expect during a colposcopy

- You will be asked to lie on an examination couch.
- Your legs will be supported in stirrups for better visualisation of the cervix.
- A speculum is inserted into the vagina (the same instrument used during a Cervical Screening Test); this will hold the walls of your vagina slightly apart so we can see the cervix.
- The colposcope is then used to look at the cervix. It is positioned between your legs but does not touch you.
- Another Cervical Screening Test is sometimes taken.
- Your cervix is then washed with acetic acid (a mild vinegar solution) and iodine which may sting a little but is not painful; this helps show the abnormal cells more clearly.
- Occasionally, a small biopsy from the cervix may be taken and sent for assessment with the pathologist; this may sting slightly.

What to expect following a colposcopy

- A small amount of bleeding may follow the examination from either contact with the cervix or from the site of biopsy.
- Subsequent spotting may persist for several days following a colposcopy but should not be heavy. Please use panty liners and NOT tampons during this time.
- There may be some cramping after a colposcopy, especially if a biopsy is taken. This is associated with manipulation and stimulation of the cervix causing uterine contractions, similar to "period pain".
- Abstain from sexual intercourse until any discharge stops, usually for the next 3-5 days.

Risks associated with a colposcopy

Occasionally, there can be a sensation of nausea and faintness during the procedure. This is a nerve reaction which occurs because of stretch to the cervix. If this happens, the procedure will be stopped and you will need to remain lying down until the sensation passes in 5-10 minutes.

Infection can occur, particularly after a cervical biopsy is taken. This is uncommon, however, and antibiotics are not required as a routine. Infection may occur in the first 10 days following the procedure and if you have offensive vaginal discharge, heavy bleeding, high temperatures, or excessive pain you should contact us immediately.

Heavy bleeding may occur from the site of biopsy; we will ensure bleeding from the site has settled before we let you go home however if you experience heavy bleeding immediately following the examination you should contact us.

We look forward to seeing you at your appointment. Please feel free to contact us should you have any questions.