

PAP SMEAR



Patient: What is Pap smear?

Doctor: A Pap smear (also known as the Pap test) is a medical procedure in which a sample of cells from a woman's cervix is collected and smeared on a microscope slide. The cells are examined under a microscope in order to look for pre-malignant (before-cancer) or malignant (cancer) changes.

A Pap smear is a simple, quick, and relatively painless screening test

Patient: What is it for?

Doctor: It is performed primarily to look for cervical and/or vaginal cells that are cancerous or that may be pre-cancerous. The Pap test can also be used to detect vaginal or uterine infections.

Patient: Who should have a Pap smear?

Doctor: Pregnancy does not prevent a woman from having a Pap smear. Pap smears can be safely done during pregnancy. For women over the age of 21, once every 2 to 5 years depending on your age, risk factors, use of other screening tests, and your doctor's advice. Pap smear testing is not indicated for women who have had a hysterectomy (with removal of the cervix) for benign conditions.

Patient: What are some preparations needed for the test?

Doctor: You may be instructed not to douche or tub bath for 24 hours before the Pap smear is to be performed. You may also be asked to refrain from sexual intercourse for 24 to 48 hours before the test. Do not use any vaginal creams or foams for 48 hours prior to the exam and do not schedule the test during your menstrual period.

Patient: How is a Pap smear done?

Doctor: A woman should have a Pap smear when she is not menstruating. The best time for screening is between 10 and 20 days after the first day of her menstrual period. With the woman positioned on her back, the clinician will often first examine the outside of the patient's genital and rectal areas, including the urethra (the opening where urine leaves the body), to assure that they look normal.

A speculum is then inserted into the vaginal area. (A speculum is an instrument that allows the vagina and the cervix to be viewed and examined.)

A small brush called a cervical brush is then inserted into the opening of the cervix and twirled around to collect a sample of cells. Because this sample comes from inside the cervix, this is called the endocervical sample.

A second sample is also collected as part of the Pap smear and is called the ectocervical sample ("ecto" meaning outside).

These cells are collected from a scraping of the area surrounding, but not entering, the cervical os.

Both the endocervical and the ectocervical samples are gently smeared on a glass slide and a fixative (a preservative) is used to prepare the cells on the slide for laboratory evaluation.

Patient: Why is a woman's menstrual status important for the Pap smear?

Doctor: A woman who is menstruating sheds cells from the lining of her uterus. If these cells are seen on the Pap smear of a menstruating woman, the report may note "endometrial cells, cytologically benign, in a menstruating woman. The comment that cells are "cytologically benign" means that they do appear not to be malignant (cancerous) cells. A comment of this nature is absolutely not worrisome since a menstruating woman may be expected to shed such cells.

However, if a woman is menopausal (no longer menstruating) she would not be expected to be shedding cells from the uterine lining. Therefore, endometrial cells on a Pap report might be indicative of an abnormal thickening of the endometrium, the lining of the uterus. The Pap smear is not specifically

PAP SMEAR

designed to detect such an abnormality. Nonetheless, if these cells are noted in a non-menstruating woman, her physician should attempt to determine the cause of the shedding of the endometrial cells.

Patient: How will I know the results?

Doctor: The results of the Pap smear are usually available within two to three weeks. If a woman has not learned of her results after a month, she should contact her health care practitioner's office.

Patient: Does an abnormal Pap smear always mean cancer?

Doctor: A single "abnormal" Pap smear does not necessarily indicate that cancer is present. The membranes covering the cervix undergo constant changes and repair. While treatment may not be necessary, the situation should be monitored closely. This may require a repeat Pap smear every three to six months until the situation is resolved.

QUESTIONS:

1. Why does a person who has had hysterectomy is not allowed to undergo Pap smear?
2. What are some things that shouldn't be done before the test?
3. In your own idea, is this test very important for women? Why?