

HealthyActions

Achieving Your Goals for Healthy Living



Stay Healthy: Screen for Cervical Cancer

The Pap test is also called a Pap “smear.” A Pap test can find changes in your cervix before they turn into cancer. The Pap test also finds early cancer, when it is most easy to cure.¹

Pap Smear

Q: What is cervical cancer?

A: In cervical (SIR-vih-kul) cancer, cells slowly change in the lining of the cervix (SIR-viks). This is the lower part of the uterus (YOO-ter-us), or womb. It can take many years for the changes to turn into cancer. Cervical cancer often has no symptoms.¹

Q: What is a Pap test?

A: The Pap test is also called a Pap “smear.” A Pap test can find changes in your cervix before they turn into cancer. The Pap test also finds early cancer, when it is most easy to cure.¹

Q: Why is it so important to find cervical cancer early?

A: If found in its earliest stages, cervical cancer has a treatment success rate of 92%.¹

Q: What happens when I get a Pap test?

A: In your doctor’s office, you will lie down on an exam table with your legs in holders called stirrups. Your doctor uses an instrument called a speculum (SPEK-yoo-lum) to widen your vagina. He or she then rubs a long cotton swab against your cervix to scrape off some cervical cells. The cells from your cervix are placed onto a glass slide.

Q: Does it hurt?

A: This test is quick, and for most women it is not painful.

Q: What happens after I’ve had my Pap test?

A: Your doctor sends the slide with your cells to a lab. You will receive results within a few weeks.

Q: If my Pap test results are abnormal, does this mean I have cancer?

A: No. If your results are abnormal, your doctor will do more tests. There are many reasons for an abnormal Pap test. Usually an abnormal result does not mean you have cancer.²

Q: When should I have my first Pap test?

A: The American Cancer Society recommends that you have your first Pap test three years after you start having sexual intercourse, or when you turn 21, whichever comes first.¹



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If you haven't been getting regular Pap tests, make an appointment with your doctor today. Getting a Pap test could save your life!

Q: How often should I have a Pap test?

A: You should have a Pap test every year.¹

Q: Is the Pap test accurate?

A: Yes—the Pap test has been more successful in preventing cancer than any other screening test. You can do these things to make your Pap test results even more accurate²:

- Don't get your Pap test while you are having your period.
- Avoid douching, using tampons, or having sexual intercourse for the two days before the test.
- Avoid using birth control foams, creams, and jellies or vaginal creams or medicines for the two days before the test.

Q: Are some women more likely to get cervical cancer than others?

A: Women who are infected with human papilloma virus (HPV), also called “genital warts,” are at higher risk for cervical cancer. Women with HPV can still prevent cervical cancer by getting a Pap test every year.¹

Also at higher risk for getting cervical cancer are women who¹:

- Have had many sexual partners or who began having sexual intercourse at an early age.
- Smoke cigarettes.
- Have a mother or sister who has had cervical cancer.
- Have had previous abnormal Pap tests.
- Are Hispanic or African-American.

References

1. American Cancer Society. “Cervical Cancer” downloadable document. Available at: <http://documents.cancer.org/115.00/115.00.pdf> Accessed June 29, 2007.
2. CDC. Downloadable PDF file. Cervical Cancer: Basic Facts on Screening and the Pap Test. Available at: http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/cc_basic.pdf Accessed June 29, 2007.