

Whole Woman's Health of Baltimore
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Colposcopy/Biopsy

Colposcopy:

This is a method of looking at the cervix, the vagina, and the vulva. It is difficult to evaluate the condition of the cervix and/or vagina by just looking with the naked eye. The instrument that is used is called a colposcope, which is a low powered microscope which allows the doctor to see magnified cells of the cervix. A colposcopic exam helps in checking:

- Abnormal Pap Smears
- Benign (non-cancerous) conditions
- DES-Exposed daughters: DES (Diethylstilbestrol- a form of estrogen) was used in the past to prevent miscarriages. Some daughters born to women who used this hormone during their pregnancy have unusual cells in their vaginas or cervixes, which can be seen most clearly with the colposcope.

Colposcopy Procedure:

The exam takes from 5 to 15 minutes and is done in a doctor's office. The exam is usually done between menstrual periods. The woman lies on the exam table as for a pelvic exam. The doctor places a speculum into the woman's vagina. Staining material which is like vinegar or iodine may be put on the cervix or vaginal walls, this does not hurt. A colposcope is placed near the opening of the vagina to see the cervix. It does not enter the vagina. The exam is no more uncomfortable than a regular pelvic exam. Feel free to ask the nurse or doctor about the results of the exam or if you have any other questions or concerns.

If a Biopsy is Necessary:

For some women, a colposcopic exam may be used to find an area from which to take a biopsy. A biopsy is a procedure in which a small amount of tissue (enough to include several cell layers) is taken from the cervix.

The Biopsy Procedure:

The tissue is sent to a laboratory to find out whether cell changes show cancer or not. Local anesthesia is usually not used because pain nerves to the cervix are few. Many women describe the biopsy procedure as feeling like a pinch or a cramp. Any discomfort is over quickly. Some mild vaginal bleeding or spotting may occur for 1-3 days after the procedure. Usually, the laboratory examination of the tissue takes several days. A post-operative visit will be scheduled two weeks later to discuss the result of any biopsies and further therapy if any precancerous cells are found on the biopsy.