

Whole Woman's Health of Baltimore
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Your Annual Gynecologic (GYN) Exam

To our Patients and Their Friends and Family,

Welcome to Whole Woman's Health. We are happy to have you as our patient and we will do everything we can to ensure that your experience with us is a good one. At Whole Woman's Health our emphasis is on the whole woman – head, heart, and body. We believe you are the most important person involved in your health care and we encourage your participation. We support your ability to decide what's best for you and are here to guide you and provide you with the information you need.

Many of our patients have questions regarding their annual exam. This packet is designed to address your concerns. Please read the information carefully, and know that your questions are always welcome.

Why Should I Have a GYN Exam Every Year?

General recommendations for women's health care advise that women get yearly examinations, even if they are feeling well and haven't noticed any problems. We recommend you have a breast exam, a pelvic exam and Pap test yearly. An annual GYN check-up serves a few purposes:

- to detect current health problems, including breast abnormalities, pelvic infections, and cervical cancer
- to evaluate risk factors for new problems which can develop
- to monitor health changes over time
- to prescribe and evaluate use of birth control methods (if pregnancy prevention is desired)
- to provide guidance and teaching that will promote wellness and good health habits

When Should I Have a GYN Exam?

Women should receive GYN exams starting at age 18, or whenever they begin sexual activity (whichever comes first). If a woman has normal Pap tests, normal breast exams, and no other problems regarding her reproductive health, she may only need a check-up once a year. We recommend additional visits if:

- You have heavy or unusual vaginal discharge, or other signs or infection such as irritation/itching, sores, blisters, or warts
- You are having menstrual problems such as heavy bleeding, severe pain, or skipped periods
- You are bleeding or "spotting" between normal periods
- You have pain or bleeding during sexual activity
- You have frequent, unexplained pelvic pain
- You are planning on becoming pregnant
- Your sexual partner has been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection, or has symptoms of one

Your GYN Exam

A GYN exam (also called an “annual exam”) at Whole Woman's Health usually consists of 4 parts:

- Review of general paperwork, and payment
- Lab testing and medical history interview
- Consultation and exam
- Check out

Paperwork intake and payment

You will be given medical history forms and informational paperwork when you arrive to the office. When your chart is complete you will meet with our intake staff to review the paperwork, make your payment, and ask any questions you may have about our office or your visit.

Labwork and Medical History Interview

A staff person will ask you to leave a urine sample and then meet you in the lab area to check your blood pressure, pulse, temperature, height and weight. We will also take a blood sample (finger prick) to check your hemoglobin (to see if you are anemic or have low iron).

We will take you to a private room to talk with a staff member. This is an opportunity for you to ask all of your questions about your health and medical history. You will discuss your menstrual cycle, sexual activity, and overall health. We will also discuss your family’s medical history. It’s important for you to be totally honest in this discussion – even if you feel silly or uncomfortable talking about your personal history. This information helps your provider better understand your health issues, medical concerns, and *you*. Remember, your records are always completely confidential.

Now is also a good time to discuss birth control methods, if avoiding pregnancy is a concern for you. Of course, if you have any other questions or concerns about your health, be sure to let us know!

Consultation and Exam with Provider

First, the provider will examine your head and neck, listen to your lungs and heart, and examine your abdomen and legs. This helps us learn your overall health status, and gives important information about conditions that may require follow-up or testing with our clinic or your primary care provider.

Then, we will examine your breasts for lumps, skin changes, or any other abnormalities. This is very important for every woman, no matter how old you are. Most women have natural lumps and bumps. Not all unusual lumps, bumps, or other breast changes are cancerous – but it’s still very important to have a yearly breast exam to be sure.

After your provider finishes the general screening and breast exam, s/he will begin your pelvic exam. Pelvic exams are done for a few reasons:

- To learn the general condition and health of your genitals and reproductive organs: the vulva, vagina, cervix, uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes
- To get samples of your cervical cells for a Pap smear, and/or to get testing for gonorrhea and Chlamydia (two common sexually transmitted infections)
- To check for infections or other problems

It's important for women to have yearly pelvic exams! Even though the exam sounds uncomfortable, it is over quickly and should not be painful. The most important thing to remember is to try to relax.

You will be asked to lie down on the exam table with a drape sheet over your legs and stomach. You will then place your heels in the heel-rests at the end of the table, and let your knees relax outwards to the side. After examining your vulva and the outside opening to your vagina, the doctor or nurse practitioner will do an internal examination.

Keeping your abdominal muscles soft and your knees relaxed to the sides will go a long way toward making the exam more comfortable. If you begin to get nervous, take a few deep breaths. Of course, let us know if something feels especially uncomfortable, or if you're having a hard time relaxing! We are here to help you and don't want you to feel uncomfortable in any way.

The provider will use a speculum (a clean metal instrument used to open the vagina) to help see inside your vagina. When they insert the speculum and open it, you will likely feel a lot of pressure in your pelvis which may feel uncomfortable but should not hurt. The doctor or nurse practitioner will then look for your cervix, which is the end of your uterus. S/he will collect a sample of cells from your cervix which will be used for your Pap test. When the sample is taken, you may feel a quick poke or a pinch.

After getting the samples we need, the doctor or nurse practitioner will gently take the speculum out of your vagina. Then, while wearing gloves, he or she will place two fingers inside your vagina. With their other hand, they will press on your lower abdomen – this will feel like a lot of pressure. This helps us learn the size and shape of your uterus and ovaries, as well as find any areas of tenderness. It is important to remember to try to keep your belly muscles relaxed, because it will help make this part of the exam more comfortable as well as help us complete our exam quickly.

After Your Exam / Check Out

Your provider will discuss the results of your exam with you. If your exam was normal, he or she will recommend that you return for another exam and Pap smear in one year. At this time, we may prescribe medications including a birth control method for you, and will show you how to use them as well as when to return to the clinic for a follow-up visit. If any problems are discovered, we will make sure you understand what's wrong and discuss a treatment plan. Please stop at the front desk to check out, and to get any prescriptions.

When Do I Get My Test Results?

At Whole Woman's Health, we can get some tests back right away – for example, a urine pregnancy test, or an evaluation of vaginal discharge to check for a yeast infection. Other tests may have to be sent to a laboratory to get results. This means you may have to wait a few days or a few weeks for results, depending on the test. In particular, Pap smears can take a few days to a few weeks to get results. If your test is negative or “within normal limits”, we will not send you anything (no news is good news). Sometimes tests *do* come back showing an abnormal result. If this is the case, we will call you right away to let you know, and discuss with you what we can do about the problem.

Any Questions?

If you still have questions about GYN exams, about your annual visit, or what other services we offer at Whole Woman's Health, just ask us while you're at the clinic or give us a call!