

What is Colposcopy? A Patient Guide

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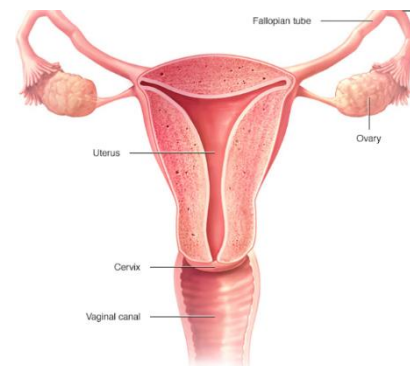
Colposcopy is a way of looking at the **cervix, vagina or vulva** through a special magnifying device called a colposcope. A colposcope can greatly enlarge the normal view. This examination allows the health care provider to find problems that cannot be seen by the eye alone.

Why is colposcopy done?

Colposcopy is mainly done when results of cervical cancer screening tests (pap smear) show abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix or vagina. It also is done to look at abnormalities of the vulva. These may be precancerous changes.

Colposcopy also may be used to further assess other problems:

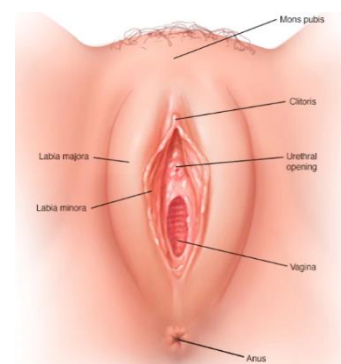
- Genital warts on the cervix
- Cervicitis (an inflamed cervix)
- Benign (not cancer) growths, such as polyps
- Pain and / or Bleeding



How is the procedure performed?

As with a pelvic examination, you will lie on your back with your feet raised and placed on foot rests for support. A speculum will be used to hold apart the vaginal walls so that the inside of the vagina and the cervix can be seen. If the vulva is being evaluated, a speculum is not always used. The colposcope is placed just outside the opening of your vagina.

A mild solution will be applied to your cervix, vagina or vulva with a cotton swab or cotton ball. This liquid makes abnormal areas easier to see. You may feel a slight burning.



When is a biopsy done during colposcopy?

During colposcopy, the health care provider may see abnormal areas.

A biopsy of these areas may be done. During a biopsy, a small piece of tissue is removed from the cervix, vagina or vulva. The sample is removed with a special device.

Cells also may be taken from the canal of the cervix. A special device is used to collect the cells. This is called endocervical curettage (ECC).

What should I expect during recovery?

If you have a colposcopy without a biopsy, you should feel fine right away. You can do the things you normally do. You may have a little spotting for a couple of days.

If you have a colposcopy with a biopsy, you may have pain and discomfort for 1 or 2 days. Over-the-counter pain medications can be helpful. You may have some vaginal bleeding. You also may have a dark discharge for a few days. This may occur from medication used to help stop bleeding at the biopsy site. You may need to wear a sanitary pad until the discharge stops.

Your health care provider may suggest you limit your activity for a brief time. While the tissue heals, you will be told not to put anything into your vagina for a short time:

- Do not have sex
- Do not use tampon
- Do not douche

Call your health care provider right away if you have any of these problems:

- Heavy vaginal bleeding (using more than one sanitary pad per hour)
- Severe lower abdominal pain
- Fever
- Chills

Handout References: ACOG.org, Mayo Clinic.org