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Colposcopy Fact Sheet

WHAT IS A COLPOSCOPE?

The colposcope is an instrument that looks like a pair of binoculars mounted on a tripod, and is used to magnify the tissues of the cervix, vagina, or vulva. This enables the examiner to see minor changes in the color of these tissues and surface blood vessels patterns, which are not visible to the naked eye. It is these subtle differences, which help distinguish healthy tissue from abnormal tissue. The colposcope is usually used to evaluate women with an abnormal Pap smear. The Pap smear is a screening test and looks at the characteristics of individual cells. The colposcope allows us to identify any microscopically abnormal areas to biopsy for a more thorough tissue evaluation by a pathologist.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE PROCEDURE?

The colposcopy is performed during a regular office visit. It is preferable to schedule this while you are not on your period. We recommend that you take two ibuprofen or Aleve tablets before coming to the office to minimize discomfort and cramping after the procedure. Prior to the procedure we will perform a urine pregnancy test to make sure that you are not pregnant. Although this procedure can be done while you are pregnant, there are certain types of biopsies that we would want to avoid. The examiner will first do a regular pelvic examination. Then a speculum will be placed in the vagina to visualize the cervix. The cervix and vagina will then be washed with a vinegar solution to help remove any mucous or discharge. Another benefit of the vinegar solution is that it brings out the color changes and blood vessel patterns of any abnormal tissue. The examiner will then look through the colposcope to carefully examine all the tissues. The colposcope itself remains outside the body and is not inserted into the vagina.

If any abnormal areas are identified during the examination, it may be necessary to take a small biopsy. In cases of colposcopy of the cervix, often a biopsy will be taken on the outside of the cervix, and then a second biopsy taken from higher up inside the endocervical canal. The biopsies only take a short time to obtain and the doctor will let you know before she is about to take a biopsy. The biopsy may cause some cramping similar to menstrual cramps and usually lasts only a few minutes.

After the procedure, you may resume all normal activities as you feel up to it. You are able to drive yourself home or return to work. You may experience some spotting for 2 or 3 days from the biopsy sites. The examiner will often apply some silver nitrate to your biopsy sites, which acts as a chemical cautery. This may cause a charcoal, grayish discharge, which is to be expected. **We recommend that you avoid sexual intercourse for about a week after the biopsy to allow the biopsy sites to heal properly.**

The biopsy specimen is sent to an outside lab for processing and it usually takes about 5 to 7 days for the results to come back to us. We will call you with the results or notify you by another method if you prefer: mail, email or our patient portal, My Health Portfolio. The colposcope is a billable service. We will charge for doing the procedure only. If a biopsy is done, you will incur 2 additional billable charges: one from the lab and one from the lab's pathologist for processing the specimen. Most major medical insurance plan will cover the procedure because it is medically necessary. However, it is always a good idea to call your carrier prior to any services being rendered.

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