

Abnormal Pap Smear

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THE PAP SMEAR is a test that prevents cancer. Cancer of the cervix is caused by prolonged activity of a common virus, the human papilloma virus. Since the virus must be active for many years before a cancer develops, regular Pap smears will detect this activity.

COLLECTION:

Mucus from the mouth of the uterus is collected during a pelvic examination. A slide is then sent to a laboratory for evaluation. The technician looks for any indication that a virus might be active. There are two types of abnormalities revealed by the Pap smear. These are as follows:

1. DYSPLASIA:

Dysplasia is not cancer. Dysplasia is the name of the cell changes caused by the virus. These changes, which are from mild to severe, are usually present for five to thirty years before cancer develops. By eliminating these changes, cancer can be prevented. The appropriate evaluation is colposcopy.

INFLAMMATION:

Before dysphasia is present inflammation will be present. This can be caused by the virus, but is also caused by non-viral infections, tampon use, childbirth and atrophy. Most of these causes are temporary. The Pap is repeated in three months. If the condition is then gone, no evaluation is necessary. If it is still present, colposcopy is necessary.

CAUSES OF DYSPHASIA AND CANCER:

The papilloma virus is the most important requirement. This virus is very common and is present in almost half of normal people. Contrary to prior belief, it does not require sexual activity to pass. Smoking, including passive smoke, enhances the ability of the virus to cause cancer. (Apparently toxins from the smoke are carried through the blood to the cervix.)

EVALUATION AND TREATMENT OF THE ABNORMAL PAP:

REPEAT PAP:

Evaluation of inflammation requires a repeat Pap test after three months.

COLPOSCOPY:

Evaluation of dysphasia requires colposcopy. This is an office procedure. The procedure requires special equipment. Appointments are scheduled when the equipment is available. It may take 2-8 weeks to obtain an appointment. This wait is of no concern as these abnormalities take years to progress. Colposcopy is done in the office and is similar to a pelvic examination a special microscope with an attached light is used to examine the cervix. Special solutions are painted on the area to detect the location of the abnormality. A biopsy, the taking of a small sample of tissue, is then done. This is sent to the hospital laboratory for diagnosis. The colposcopy is painless. A momentary pinch occurs when the biopsy is taken. Bleeding is controlled by a solution placed on the biopsy site. Following colposcopy, intercourse should be avoided for several days. Please return in two to six weeks for consultation and treatment. You will be notified by telephone when we receive the biopsy report.

LEEP CONIZATION OF THE CERVIX:

In approximately 10-20% of cases, the colposcopy will reveal that a larger biopsy is necessary. This is called LEEP conization of the cervix. This procedure is done in the office or hospital with an anesthetic. If this is necessary, you will be given further information.

CRYOSURGERY OF THE CERVIX:

The most common treatment for a persistent infection or dysplasia is cryosurgery. This is an office procedure and does not require anesthesia. The cervix is cooled with special equipment and the abnormal area of the cervix is frozen. Cryosurgery is usually pain free. Some may notice menstrual-type cramps during the procedure. Also, you may notice a short episode of flushing or feeling light-headed after the procedure. During the next several weeks a gradually decreasing thin watery discharge will come from the healing cervix. A vaginal cream may be placed in the vagina nightly during the initial healing process.

You will be asked to return six weeks later for a follow-up visit. If you develop severe low abdominal pain or fever during the first two weeks after cryosurgery or LEEP, please call.

SETTING UP YOUR APPOINTMENT:

If you have been notified that your Pap smear was abnormal and colposcopy is indicated, you may call my appointment desk at the Women's Health Center to make arrangements. The number is 330-264-2717.

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