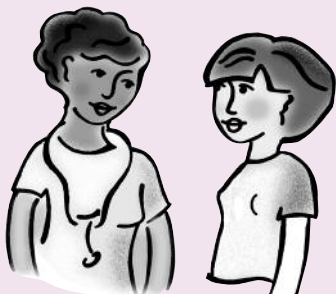


Your First Pelvic Exam

what you need to know



Doctor, what is a pelvic exam?

The pelvic exam (internal exam) is a physical examination.

Outside – the doctor or nurse checks the genitals. These are your sexual organs. They want to see if they look healthy.

Inside – they check the cervix (the opening to the uterus) and the ovaries. These are your reproductive organs. Checking the cervix is called the Pap test.

Does it hurt?

When you relax the muscles inside your vagina, it makes it more comfortable. If you feel uncomfortable, say so.

Do I have to?

It is a really important examination. It's the only way you can know if your sexual and reproductive organs are healthy, especially if you have had sexual intercourse. **Here's why:**

The Pap Test and Cancer

The Pap test is the only way to find out if there are cell changes in the cervix. These changes could lead to cancer. Cancer of the cervix is 90% preventable. This cancer is related to a virus called Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). HPV can cause changes to cells on the cervix. You can get this virus by having unprotected sex.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs).

A pelvic exam also checks for Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). STDs are also known as Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). It is very common to have an STD and not know it. Most STDs can be treated and many can be cured.

Wait a minute. What if I've never had sex?

If you are over 18 and not having sex... Talk with your doctor or nurse about having a Pap test. If you decide to have it, you will still be a virgin. A virgin is a person who has not had sex.

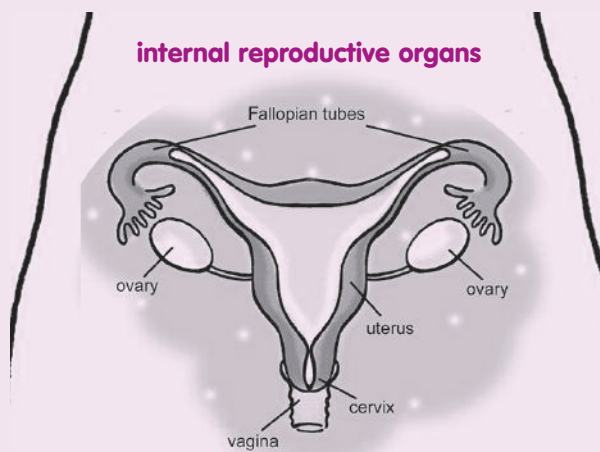
If you are under 18 and having sex... The cells of your cervix are not fully developed. This makes it easier for these cells to be infected by HPV. It is really good idea to have your first pelvic exam.

What if I'm a lesbian?

If you only have sex with women... You still need to have a pelvic exam. Women having sex with women can pass on some STDs to each other. Lesbians can also have abnormal Pap test results.

Suppose I want to talk about other stuff?

The physical exam is only one part of your care. Feel free to ask questions. Maybe you want to know more about how your body works. Maybe you're not happy with your love life. Now is the time to ask some questions or get help.



So, what do you say? Will you do it?

Well, it sounds a little embarrassing.

You already know that for some medical exams, you have to take off some clothes. For the pelvic exam, you need to take off your panties. The doctor or nurse may also want to do a breast exam. In that case, they will ask you to take off your bra. They will give you something you can use to cover yourself. If you like, a friend can come into the exam room with you.

Here's what to expect:

When you first come in, they will probably ask you to fill out a form. Some of the questions are about how to contact you. They will probably want to know:

- about your periods
- if you've ever been pregnant
- about your medical history

If you need help, someone can help you with the form.

They may also want to check your blood pressure and your urine (pee).

All the information about you and your exam is private.



This is how it will go...

The whole exam will take about ten minutes.

In the examining room, they will ask you to get undressed behind a curtain or closed door. You get a gown to cover yourself. When you are ready, they will ask you to lie down on the examining table. Slide your bum to the end, put your feet on the metal footrests and let your knees flop apart.

First,

The doctor or nurse will look at your genital area for any sores or irritation. This is what they see.

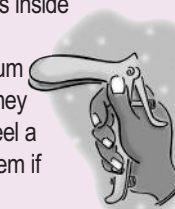


Next...

They need to be able to look inside your vagina to see the cervix. They use a speculum to do this part of the exam.

Take a deep breath, relax the muscles inside your vagina and keep breathing.

Sometimes they warm up the speculum to make it more comfortable. When they slide the speculum inside, you may feel a stretching or pulling sensation. Tell them if you are feeling uncomfortable.



What is a speculum?

The speculum keeps the walls of the vagina apart. To do the Pap test, they use a tiny brush to get cells from the cervix. (They also use STD swabs to get cells from both the vagina and the cervix.)

When the speculum is in place, they can see your cervix. Now it's easy to do the Pap test.

If you've been having vaginal, anal or oral sex with a man or a woman, they may also want to check for STDs with a swab before they take out the speculum.

You're almost finished...

After they take out the speculum, the doctor or nurse still needs to check your reproductive organs: the uterus, Fallopian tubes and ovaries. Because they can't see them, they need to feel them. The doctor or nurse inserts two fingers of one gloved hand into your vagina, just like the speculum. The other hand presses on your belly, checking to see if there is any tenderness or anything unusual. If everything feels OK, that's it!

There may be a few drops of blood in your underwear. They can give you a pad.

The tests will be sent to a lab. The lab will send a report back to the doctor or nurse. Ask when and how you can get your results.

What happens when I get my test results?

Let's look at them one at a time.

Pap test results

Most Pap test results are normal. But sometimes the Pap test results show that there's a problem, like HPV. Some types of HPV only cause warts, either on the genitals or inside the vagina. Other types of HPV can cause the cell changes on the cervix we talked about before.

Abnormal cells

If there are abnormal cells, they often go back to normal in six to twelve months. Sometimes they recommend a more detailed test, called a colposcopy. Sometimes they recommend treatment.

STD results

If the tests show that you have an STD, you will need to come back for treatment. Your sexual partner(s) from the past three months or longer will also need to be treated. If you have an STD, treatment is very important.

If all the tests come back OK, you will have your next internal exam in one year.

Suppose I need birth control?

The doctor or nurse can help you choose the method that is best for you and your partner. You can get birth control pills, condoms or another method and learn how to use it. If you use condoms for birth control, they will also help protect you against STDs, including HIV/AIDS.

I'm going to tell all my friends about this.

All right!

When you go, remember to:

- ✓ take your Ontario Health card, if you have one
- ✓ write down the first day of your last period
- ✓ write down any questions you have on the back of this pamphlet
- ✓ shower and change your underwear before you go

But don't:

- ✗ go when you have your period
- ✗ have vaginal intercourse for 24 hours before
- ✗ use anything like spermicide in the vagina for 48 hours before
- ✗ worry about odour – a very strong smell or an unusual discharge tells your health care provider that there may be a problem
- ✗ douche, which means cleaning the inside of the vagina with a special fluid. It's not healthy for your vagina. Your vagina cleans itself.

Maybe you have some questions you want to write down before you go for your pelvic exam.

Write them down here:

Date of my last period _____

Number of days I bled _____

Length of my cycle _____

Questions I want to ask the doctor/nurse...

Some research shows that nicotine from smoking causes cells on the cervix to change. If you are a smoker, think about quitting.

All clinic services are free and confidential.

For sexual health information or to find a clinic near you, call the AIDS and Sexual Health InfoLine at: 416-392-2437 or visit www.toronto.ca/health

 **TORONTO** Public Health

having SEX?



you need to get checked

**your
first
pelvic
exam**