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AN EXPERT GUIDE TO

Pap Smears

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Welcome to your guide to Pap Smears.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that women between the ages of 21 and 65 have routine Pap test screenings - often referred to as Pap smears - at least once every three years. These tests, which are conducted in your physician's office, identify cancerous and precancerous cells in the cervix. They also provide you with an opportunity to discuss any reproductive health concerns you may have with your physician. In this guide, we'll break down the Pap smear – let's review how they work, how to prepare for one, and how to interpret your results.

XX,
Team Binto

How do Paps work?

The PAP test is conducted in your gynecologist's office. Your gynecologist has you lie on a special table equipped with stirrups where you can position your feet to provide easier access to the cervix. Your physician will then insert a tool, called a speculum, into your vagina to hold it open. This allows your doctor to gently scrape cells from your cervix, which will be examined in a lab.

Most women experience little discomfort from the PAP aside from some cramping that resembles menstrual cramps. You may experience some spotty bleeding in the aftermath of the test.

Preparing for Your Pap

The Office of Women's Health recommends women avoid doing the following for at least two days prior to a Pap test:

- Sexual Intercourse
- Douching
- Using Tampons
- Using Vaginal Medications
- Using Spermicidal Foams, Creams, or Jellies
- Using Vaginal Sprays or Powders

The above activities may obscure or remove the abnormal cells the tests are designed to identify. You should also avoid conducting a Pap smear while menstruating, if possible.

Why should you get a Pap?

When it comes to cervical cancer, early detection is key to a successful outcome. Routine Pap tests can identify early areas of concern that warrant further investigation, allowing you to route out potential problems before cancer develops.

Ultimately, Pap smears save lives.

Understanding Your Results

Cervical cancer typically develops slowly, according to the U.S. National Library of Medicine. This means that a successful Pap smear every three years - in women who have normal results on previous Pap tests - typically can detect development before it becomes a problem.

Normal results often indicate that there is no cancer, or signs of developing cancer. Following up routinely, every three years for women with average risks, can greatly reduce your risks of developing cancer between screenings. Abnormal results require further attention. They do not necessarily indicate that you have cancer. Some simply mean you have atypical cells that require further investigation.

Some changes may be the direct result of the presence of Human Papillomavirus (HPV), a group consisted of more than 150 related viruses. Some of these viruses can lead to cervical cancers. The presence of HPV does not mean you will get cancer, even if it is a type that can potentially cause cancer. If you have one of the HPV types that can cause cervical cancer, it does place you in a higher risk category, which may require more frequent Pap tests. Further testing is almost always prescribed whenever an abnormal result shows up.

If treatment is needed, doctors may recommend you undergo one of the following:

- Colposcopy - directed Biopsy
- Cervix Cryosurgery
- Cone Biopsy
- Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure (LEEP)

Cervical cancer is often referred to as a silent killer because women don't experience symptoms until the disease is in advanced stages. Early detection through Pap smears is the best way to catch this disease for a more successful long-term outcome.

SOURCES:

http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm

<http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/pdf/guidelines.pdf>

<https://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/pap-test.html>

<https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/003911.htm>