

BRENNAN OB/GYN ASSOCIATES, P.C.

Obstetrics and Gynecology

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WHAT IS A COLPOSCOPY?

One of the most frightening times in a woman's life is when the gynecologist calls and says her Pap smear results are abnormal. Although you might think any abnormal Pap smear means you have cervical cancer, the fact is that the majority of abnormal Pap smears are not caused by cervical cancer. The more likely cause of abnormal Pap smear results is inflammation of a vaginal infection.

Because the Pap smear is a screening tool and not a diagnostic tool, your gynecologist may want to take a closer look at your cervix to determine the cause of your abnormal Pap smear results. The tool your gynecologist uses to get a closer look at your cervix is called a colposcope. The Colposcope is used for the colposcopy examination. Reasons your doctor may have for ordering this procedure include Pap smear results which indicate dysplasia or cancer, show evidence of HPV, or show atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance. (ASCUS)

During the colposcopy procedure your gynecologist uses a colposcope to visually exam the cervix. Colposcopy is a simple procedure that is performed in the gynecologist's office. The procedure takes about ten or fifteen minutes. You may have some cramping during this procedure, and are advised to take Tylenol or Advil prior to your appointment.

The colposcopy procedure is similar to the Pap smear. You are positioned on the examination table as in a Pap smear. However, acetic acid (such as common table vinegar) is placed on the cervix. This causes the cervical cells to fill with water so light will not pass through them.

Another difference that you will notice is that your physician uses a colposcope to view your cervix. A colposcope is a large, electric microscope that is positioned approximately 30cm from the vagina. A bright light on the end of the colposcope makes it possible for the gynecologist to clearly see the cervix.

During the colposcopy, the gynecologist focuses on the areas of the cervix where light does not pass through. Abnormal cervical changes are seen as white areas, the whiter the area the worse the cervical dysplasia.

If your physician is able to view the entire abnormal area through the colposcope, a tissue sample or biopsy is taken and sent to the lab for further evaluation.

If your physician is unable to view the entire abnormal area, as when the abnormal area extends inside the cervix, another procedure such as a cone biopsy or LEEP procedure may be performed at the hospital.

If you have any questions regarding this info or questions after your colposcopy procedure, feel free to call our office.