Gynaecology Oncology Department

The Colposcopy Examination

Coming for colposcopy
You have an appointment to attend the colposcopy clinic. This leaflet explains what may be involved. Please read it carefully and keep it for reference.

If you cannot attend your appointment, please telephone the colposcopy co-ordinators, giving as much notice as possible so that your appointment can be used by someone else.

Why you need a colposcopy
Following your recent visit to your doctor you have been referred to the colposcopy clinic for a more detailed examination.

What is colposcopy?
Colposcopy is looking at the neck of the womb (cervix), vagina and/or vulva with a magnifying instrument called a colposcope. The procedure is performed in the outpatient clinic. It is simple, quick and generally painless.

A general anaesthetic is not required and you can therefore eat and drink as normal. You may wish to bring someone with you.

When you come for your appointment
The procedure takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

When you arrive at the clinic you will be checked in by the receptionist. If your name, address or GP has changed since your appointment was made, please telephone the clinic co-ordinator on 01223 216603 before you come, so that your records can be amended before you arrive.

If you would like to talk to a trained nurse before seeing the colposcopist, please inform the co-ordinator or receptionist.
Occasionally there are observers within the clinic, such as medical/nursing students and practice nurses. If you do not want them to be present during your appointment, please tell the receptionist on arrival.

You will see a colposcopist and there will be nurses who will support you during the procedure.

You will have a consultation where you will be asked relevant questions about your symptoms/reason for referral. If relevant you will be asked to give the date of the first day of your last period. Colposcopy or treatment cannot be performed if you are having a period. However, if you have been referred because of abnormal vaginal bleeding then it is very important that you attend your appointment.
If you are pregnant, what will happen?
If you are pregnant it is still important that you attend for a colposcopy. A colposcopy can be safely performed in pregnancy.

What happens during the examination?
You will lie on a special couch with your legs well supported. Depending on the reasons why you have been referred, a metal speculum may be inserted into the vagina (similar to having a smear taken) to enable the colposcopist to obtain a good view of your cervix/vagina.

The colposcope does not go inside you. You can watch the procedure, if you wish, on the TV screen that is by your side. You may have swabs taken to exclude infection. A cervical sample (smear) may be taken and possibly a small biopsy. The colposcopist will explain exactly what they are doing and discuss any procedures with you.

Depending on what procedure you have had (if any), you will be given aftercare advice and written information to take home with you. Although you are very unlikely to have anything seriously wrong with you. If you feel anxious or worried please ask to talk to a trained nurse about your treatment.

If you have any queries before your appointment and would like to speak to the colposcopy nurse please ring 01223 216603, Monday to Friday 09:00 to 16:00. If you leave a message on the answer phone someone will get back to you as soon as possible.

Useful contact numbers
For appointments or queries:
Colposcopy co-ordinators: 01223 216603

An answer phone is available out of office hours and when the telephone is unmanned. If you use the answer phone, please leave your name, hospital number and any message and we will get back to you as soon as possible.

Nurse colposcopists: 01223 256139 or 01223 216603
We are a smoke-free site: smoking will not be allowed anywhere on the hospital site. For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169.

Other formats:

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio, please ask the department where you are being treated, to contact the patient information team: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk.

Please note: We do not currently hold many leaflets in other languages; written translation requests are funded and agreed by the department who has authored the leaflet.

Document history

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