

Pap Test

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A Pap test is used to find cell changes in the cervix. Some of these changes can lead to cancer. The Pap test can find cervical cancer early when it is easier to treat and cure.

Pap Test Schedule

If you do not have signs or symptoms of a cervical problem, and you have no history of abnormal Pap test results, your health care provider will recommend the following schedule for Pap tests:

- Ages 21 to 29:
 - have a Pap test every 3 years
 - or
 - have an HPV test every 5 years starting at age 25 (if your doctor advises)
- Ages 30 to 65:
 - have a Pap test every 3 years
 - or
 - have an HPV test every 5 years
 - or
 - have a Pap test and HPV test every 5 years
- Ages 65 or older: You can stop having Pap tests if you had:
 - regular Pap tests until age 65
 - or
 - 3 normal Pap tests in a row
 - or
 - 2 normal combination screens (Pap and HPV) over the last 10 years. The most recent test has to be within 5 years.

If you have signs or symptoms of a cervical problem or are at a higher risk for cervical changes, your health care provider may recommend a different schedule. You might also get a Pap test for other reasons such as heavy vaginal bleeding.

Before the Test

To help assure reliable results from your Pap test, please avoid the following for 2 days before your appointment because these can wash away or hide any changed cells:

- sexual intercourse
- douches
- using tampons
- vaginal medicines
- spermicidal foams, creams or jellies.

During the Test

- You will be asked to undress from the waist down. You will lie on your back on the exam table. Your buttocks will be at the edge of the table and your feet will be placed in foot rests. You will have a sheet draped over your hips.
- Your health care provider will gently insert a speculum into your vagina to open it and use a small spatula and a small brush to gently sweep cells from your cervix. The cells will be sent to a lab.
- Your health care provider may use swabs to take other samples to test for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) or other infections.

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- Your health care provider may also do a pelvic exam to feel your uterus and ovaries.
- During a pelvic exam, your health care provider will put a gel on the glove and put a finger into your vagina. Using the other hand on the outside of your lower abdomen, your health care provider will feel your inner organs to see if there is anything unusual.

After the Test

- After the Pap test or pelvic exam, your health care provider will leave and you may get dressed.
- The Pap test will be sent to a special lab where a doctor will look for cell changes. Abnormal cells will be looked at closely for cancer, infection or both. Abnormal cells do not mean you have cancer.
- You will be contacted with the results from your test.

Your Results

The results of your Pap test will help your health care provider create a treatment plan that is right for you.

Pap test results are placed in one of these categories:

- **Normal:** Only normal cells were collected during your Pap test.
- **HPV:** This is a group of viruses that includes more than 100 different types. Some may cause genital warts or cervical cancer
- **ASC (atypical squamous cells):** These are thin flat cells that form the surface of the cervix. There are two groups of ASC:
 - ASC-US (atypical squamous cells of undetermined significance). These cells are mild abnormalities.
 - ASC-H (atypical squamous cells not excluding HSIL). These cells are abnormal and may be at a higher risk of being precancerous.

- **AGC (atypical glandular cells):** These cells are abnormal and your health care provider will need to do more testing to find out why.
- **LSIL (low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion).** There are early changes of cells in an area of abnormal tissue of the cervix. These cells are mild abnormalities mostly caused by HPV.
- **LSIL-H (low-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion not excluding HSIL).** These calls are abnormal and may be at a higher risk of being precancerous.
- **HSIL (high-grade squamous intraepithelial lesion).** There are more advanced changes in the size and shape of abnormal cells. This means the cells look very different under the microscope compared to normal cells.
- **UNS (insufficient cells):** Not enough cells were collected during the test to evaluate them.

Follow-Up Procedures

If your results come back abnormal, your health care provider will want you to do follow-up testing. This may be having another Pap test or having a colposcopy.

Getting Your Test Results

Ask your health care provider when and how you will get the results of your Pap test.

**Information adapted from
the National Cancer Institute.**