

Diagnosing Cervical Cancer - A Quick Guide



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This is a brief summary of the information on 'Diagnosing cervical cancer' from CancerHelp UK. You will find more detailed information on the website.

In this information there are sections on

- Cervical cancer tests
- Further tests for cervical cancer
- Questions for your doctor

Cervical cancer tests

Your doctor will suggest more tests if you've had an abnormal smear, or if you have symptoms which could be caused by cervical cancer. The vast majority of women who have an abnormal smear or suspicious symptoms do not have cancer.

Colposcopy

A doctor or specialist nurse uses an instrument called a colposcope to look at the surface of the cervix. The doctor will take a biopsy of any abnormal areas. For most women, colposcopy is painless and you can go home straight afterwards. If your doctor finds an area of abnormal cells, you may have treatment there and then. But you can choose to come back for treatment if you prefer. Colposcopy is safe if you are pregnant. In most cases, any

treatment for pre cancerous cells can be planned for after you've had the baby. Your doctor will be very careful about taking biopsies.

Cone biopsy

This is a minor operation that you usually have under general anaesthetic. You will probably stay in hospital overnight. The doctor cuts out a cone of tissue from your cervix. This is sent to the laboratory for examination under the microscope.

Afterwards you may have a gauze pack in your vagina to help stop bleeding. It is normal to have bleeding for up to 4 weeks after a cone biopsy. You will need to avoid heavy housework or lifting for the first week or so. You shouldn't do vigorous exercise or have sexual intercourse for 4 to 6 weeks after your cone biopsy.

Further tests for cervical cancer

Your doctor may suggest some further tests if you have been diagnosed with cervical cancer. You need more tests to see how far the cancer has grown, whether it has spread and to decide on the best treatment.



Pelvic examination under anaesthetic

You have this under general anaesthetic so that your specialist can examine you thoroughly and take biopsies if necessary. The examination includes checking your womb, vagina, rectum and bladder, to see if cancer has spread to any of these areas.

Other tests

Your doctor might want you to have a scan to stage your cancer and check for cancer spread. An MRI scan uses magnetism to build up a picture of the body. A CT scan is a type of computerised X-ray. You may have a PET-CT scan which combines a CT scan and a scan that uses a low dose of radioactive liquid. You may have blood tests to check your general health. You may also have a chest X-ray to check for signs of cancer in the lungs.

Waiting for the results

You may feel very anxious while waiting for the results of your tests. It may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. If you would like to talk to someone outside your own friends and family, look in the 'coping with cancer' section of CancerHelp UK for more about counselling.

What to ask your doctor about cervical cancer tests

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?

- Will the tests cause any problems with pregnancy in the future?
- What happens if I don't have the tests?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Can I have all the tests as an out patient?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Who will give me the test results?
- How long will the results take?
- When should I contact you if I don't get the results?

More information

For more information about cervical cancer, visit our website <http://cancerhelp.cancerresearchuk.org>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. You can view or print the information in a larger size if you need to.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on **0808 800 4040** 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday

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