MAVEN CENTRE
ADVANCED GYNAECOLOGY & WOMEN'S HEALTH

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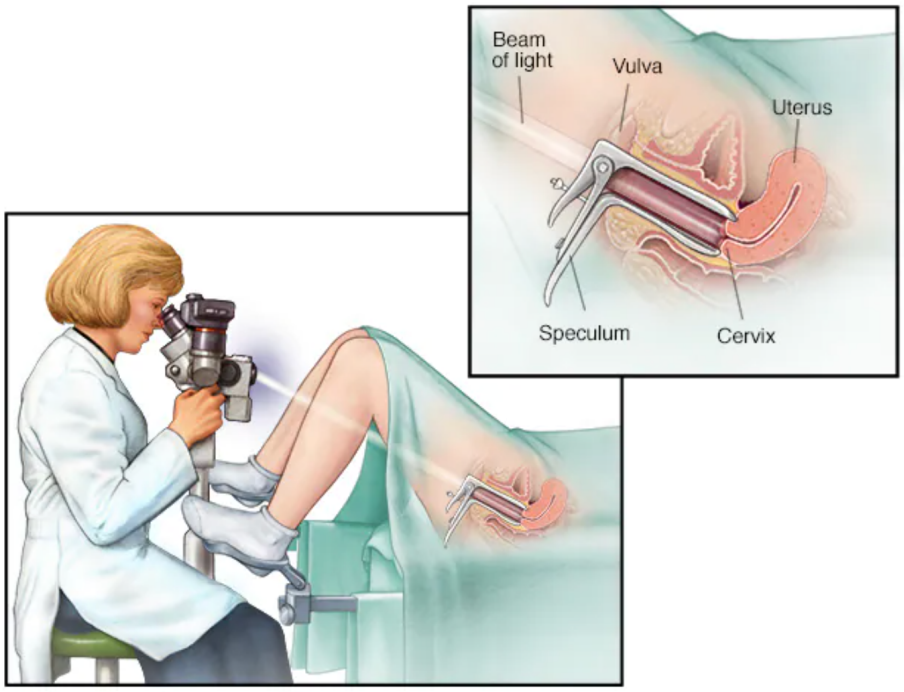
Colposcopy, cervical biopsy and LLETZ procedure: patient information

Why has a colposcopy been suggested to me?

Once you have had your routine cervical screening test (CST), you may be referred to a gynaecologist for a 'colposcopy'. Usually this is due to the presence of a relevant human papilloma virus (HPV) strain, or changes in the cervical cells. This can be concerning news to receive, and can cause anxiety; it's important to remember that these results don't necessarily indicate that you have cancer. CSTs are a *screening* test, and indicate that further investigation is required. These additional investigations (eg. colposcopy) will guide ongoing management.



How is colposcopy done?

A colposcopy is a detailed examination of the cervix, vagina, and vulva using a specialised instrument called a colposcope, which is like a big microscope on wheels. Colposcopy is typically performed by a gynaecologist or colposcopist.

From the patient's point-of-view, the procedure will feel like a cervical screening test, that takes a little bit longer (usually about 10 minutes).

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A speculum is inserted into the vagina, to allow visualisation of the cervix. The colposcope is then used to get a magnified view of the cervix. Usually your clinician will repeat the cervical screening test at this stage.

A vinegar-like liquid is then applied to the cervix, which highlights any abnormal cervical cells, thereby making them more obvious to your gynaecologist. A brown betadine-like liquid may also be applied, for similar reasons – to highlight any suspicious areas.

Why would a cervical biopsy be recommended, and how is it performed?

If abnormal cervical cells are suspected at colposcopy, a targeted sample (or 'biopsy') of these areas may be taken by your gynaecologist. These biopsies will be sent to the laboratory, for the pathology doctor to look at more closely under a normal (desk-based) microscope.

What can I expect after a colposcopy and biopsy?

While colposcopy is generally well-tolerated, many women may experience mild discomfort, or a sensation of pressure. It is important to communicate openly with your healthcare provider about any concerns or discomfort you may experience during the colposcopy: the procedure can be stopped at any time if needed.

The act of taking a targeted biopsy will cause mild discomfort and period-type cramps, which will subside over the next few hours.

What is a 'LLETZ' procedure, and how is it performed?

'LLETZ' stands for 'large loop excision of the transformation zone'. LLETZ is the most common treatment for pre-cancerous cervical cell changes. A LLETZ procedure can stop cervical cells from developing into cancer. LLETZ are successful in > 90% of cases, meaning no further treatment is needed.

Performed in an operating theatre under a general anaesthetic, a thin wire loop with an electrical current running through it is used to remove the abnormal pre-cancerous cells from the cervix.

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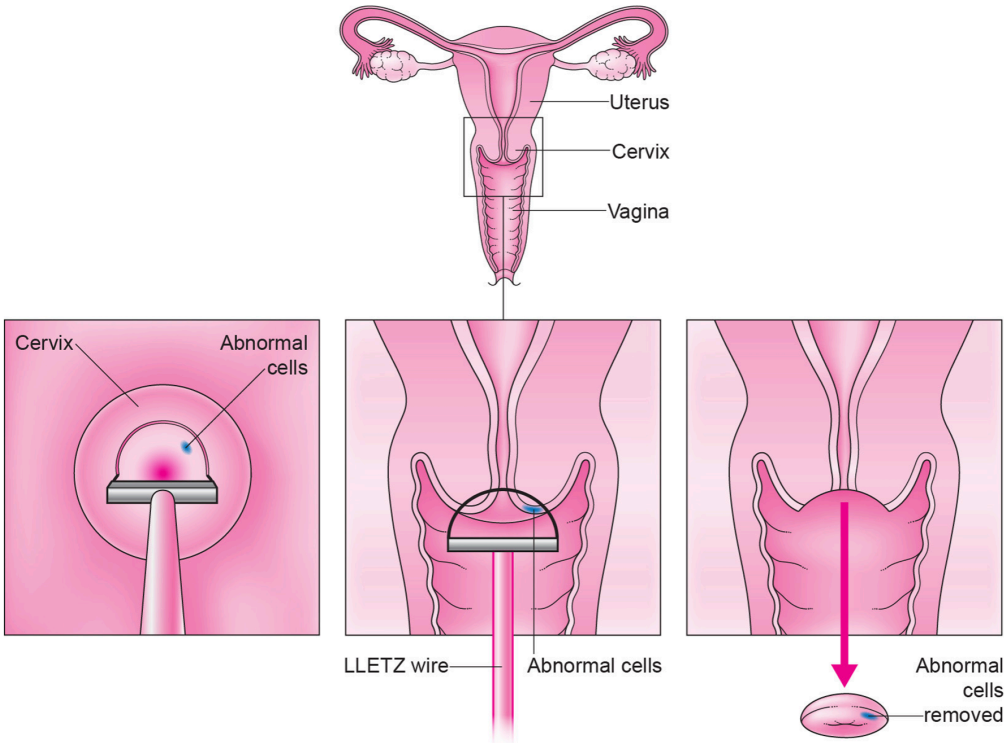

How should I look after myself, after I've had a cervical biopsy or LLETZ procedure?

Having a cervical biopsy or LLETZ procedure can lead to a few days of mild pelvic cramps. Please take any over-the-counter pain relief that you would normally take for period pain (eg. naprogesic, ibuprofen or similar).

If you work at a desk, you may feel up to going to work the day after your colposcopy and biopsy. After a LLETZ procedure, you may want to have a quiet day or two at home before going back to work.

What can I expect afterwards?

It is normal to pass black or brown discharge for a few days after the procedure. When cervical biopsies are taken, or a LLETZ procedure performed, a brown honey-like solution is often applied to the cervix to stop bleeding. This solution may lead to brown vaginal discharge. When this solution is combined with red blood, is causes a black tar-like discharge.

It is normal to experience some light vaginal bleeding (or 'spotting'). If you experience heavier bleeding, please contact Maven Centre. In the event of very heavy bleeding (eg. passing large clots), please present to your local emergency department.

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When to seek medical advice

Please contact your Maven Centre gynaecologist if you notice any of the following:

- Persistent vaginal bleeding that is bright red and / or getting heavier each day
- Passing large blood clots (eg. the size of a fifty-cent piece or larger)
- Severe pain in your pelvis (the part of your tummy below your belly button)
- A temperature at or above 38°C
- An abnormally smelly vaginal discharge

If you think it is an emergency, and it can't wait until you can see your GP or Maven Centre gynaecologist, please attend your local Emergency Department.

Frequently asked questions

When can I use tampons again?

To reduce the risk of infection, please don't use tampons or a menstrual cup for at least two weeks after a cervical biopsy or LLETZ procedure. If your next period comes in the two weeks after your procedure, please only use sanitary pads.

Similarly, please don't have penetrative sex for two weeks after your procedure.

When will I get the results of my procedure?

It usually takes 7 – 10 days for a laboratory to finalise the results from the specimens that are sent there (eg. cervical biopsy, LLETZ specimen). If you are concerned, please contact Maven Centre and ask your gynaecologist to pass the results on to you.

See our blog post for more information on colposcopies and interpretation of results:
https://www.mavencentre.com.au/maven-journal/navigating-colposcopies-cervical-intraepithelial-neoplasia-cin-changes-and-their-significance/

This pamphlet is a general overview of colposcopy and LLETZ, and may not apply to everyone. If you have any further questions, please speak to your gynaecologist.