



The Pelvic Exam: What You Should Know

The pelvic exam is an internal examination of the female reproductive organs: vagina, cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes, and ovaries. The doctor or nurse practitioner performing the exam will explain to you what he or she is doing during the course of the pelvic exam. Here is some helpful information for you to look at though before an exam, so you are prepared and understand why we do what we do. Please ask questions if you have any!

Why Is the Pelvic Exam Done?

A pelvic exam is done to check for size and appearance of your reproductive organs and to check for cancer and infections.

How Often Should I Have a Pelvic Exam?

The recommendations vary depending on your age, family history and sexual activity. Generally, since 2009, it is now recommended that you should start having regular pelvic exams and PAP tests at age 21, or within three years of the first time you have sex, whichever happens first, and then every two years after that.

If you have a vaginal discharge that has an odor or is yellow or green in color, or if you are having pain in your lower abdomen, you should see a health provider as soon as possible.

How Is It Done?

First you will need to go to the bathroom and urinate (pee) to empty your bladder so the examiner can feel your uterus better. You may also need to pee in a cup so your urine can be examined. You will lie down on your back on a special exam table that will hold your feet so that your legs will fall far apart. This allows the examiner to see your perineum (the area between your legs by your hips).

In the first part of the exam, an instrument called a speculum is inserted into your vagina. It is then opened and the examiner can see part of your vagina and your cervix (bottom of your uterus). You may at first feel some pressure, but it

should not be too uncomfortable.

Now some tests will be done. The examiner takes some mucus and cells from the cervix with a Q-tip and a wooden spatula. These tests are called a *pap smear* which looks for cancer cells. The other tests are done for sexually transmitted diseases: gonorrhea and chlamydia. Other tests that may be done depending on your symptoms, look for organisms such as yeast, gardnerella, and trichomonas. After that, the speculum is taken out of the vagina. The second part of the exam is called a *bi-manual* or *two-handed exam*. The examiner puts two fingers of one hand into your vagina and touches your cervix. The other hand presses down on your lower abdomen. This is done to feel the size and position of your uterus and ovaries, and to find out if there are any cysts, lumps or areas of tenderness or pain.

The pelvic exam is now done.

Sometimes, the examiner will ask if you know how to do a *self breast exam*. If not, you will be taught how to do this very important exam. Your breasts will also be checked by the examiner to make sure you have no lumps. You should perform breast exams monthly, the day after your period ends.

Does the Pelvic Exam Hurt?

The exam normally does not hurt or cause pain. Sometimes when you are feeling tense and the muscles of your abdomen are not relaxed you may have a feeling of pressure in your lower abdomen as the speculum is inserted into your vagina. If you have an infection somewhere in your reproductive organs, this may cause you to feel more uncomfortable with the exam.

Is There Anything I Can Do to Help During the Pelvic Exam?

Yes! You can try to relax your stomach muscles by taking deep, slow breaths through your mouth and by calming your thoughts by thinking of something pleasant.

We pledge not only to care for you, but to care about you.