Preparing for a Colposcopy

WHAT IS A COLPOSCOPY?

A colposcopy is an examination of the cervix and/or vagina with a magnifying instrument called a colposcope. With the colposcope, your health care provider can see changes in the cells that cannot be seen by the naked eye. Although the exam may be slightly uncomfortable, it is not painful. It usually takes between five and ten minutes.

WHEN SHOULD I HAVE A COLPOSCOPY?

A colposcopy should be done if you:

• Have an abnormal Pap test.
• Have genital warts or an unusual look to your cervix, vagina, or vulva.
• Have HPV.

The most common reason for colposcopy is a Pap test showing abnormal cells or dysplasia.

IF YOU NEED A COLPOSCOPY

It does not mean you have cancer. A colposcopy helps find the abnormal tissue on your cervix or vagina that made your Pap test abnormal. Most of the time, these cells are precancerous.

A biopsy of that tissue will determine whether or not you will need treatment. If precancerous cells are found and treated, cancer can be prevented.

It is extremely important for anyone having a colposcopy to keep all of her appointments. Please notify your health care provider of any telephone/address changes.

IF YOU WILL BE HAVING A COLPOSCOPY

• Do not douche or have intercourse for 48 hours before your examination.
• Schedule your appointment for a day when you do not have your period.

COLPOSCOPY STEP-BY-STEP

You will be asked to lie down on your back on a table and to place your feet in stirrups. After the speculum is inserted, a Pap test may be performed. Your cervix will be cleansed with a vinegar solution. Your health care provider will look at your cervix through the colposcope.

At the time of your colposcopy, you may need a biopsy. This involves removing very small pieces of tissue from the cervix with a special instrument. The specimens are sent to a lab to be looked at under a microscope. The biopsy may cause mild cramping and spotting. Monsel’s solution may be applied to the biopsy site to stop the bleeding.

The inside of the cervical canal may also be scraped to check for abnormal cells. This scraping may cause mild cramping and spotting.

AFTER THE COLPOSCOPY

The discomfort that you have from the biopsies will not last long and should not limit your activities. You may have vaginal spotting for a day or two.

If Monsel’s solution was used on the biopsy site, you may have a brown or green vaginal discharge that resembles coffee grounds for 1-2 days.

To prevent infection, do not use tampons for one week after the colposcopy.

You may resume sexual intercourse after the bleeding stops.

Learn how you can protect your health at: www.adagiohealth.org