

## What happens after the exam?

After the exam you will have a chance to talk to your provider about the exam. He/She will tell you about the findings of the exam. This is a good time to talk about how to stay healthy or ask any questions that you didn't ask before. Always feel free to ask questions.

## What should I remember about a pelvic exam?

Pick a provider that you feel comfortable with—one who listens to you and answers your questions. The provider works for you, so ask questions. You can even write your questions down and bring them with you. It should not hurt when you get a pelvic exam.

- You can have a friend or a relative come with you during the exam.
- Let your provider know if you have any discharge or pain.
- Know the date of your last period and how long it lasted.
- Schedule the exam when you are not having a period.

Do not douche or have sex for 24 hours before the exam.

## Remember the provider works for you!

Feel free to ask questions about the exam or your health.



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# Getting A Pelvic Exam

## Why is it important to get a pelvic exam?

Women who are sexually active or who are 21 years or older need a check-up known as a pelvic exam. The **pelvic exam** is done to check the health of your reproductive organs. These organs include the vulva, vagina, cervix, uterus, ovaries, and fallopian tubes.

Most women get a **pelvic exam** as part of a periodic physical. Other times when it may be important to get a pelvic exam are:

- To check for sexually transmitted infections (STI)
- If you have spotting or abnormal vaginal bleeding
- If you have a miscarriage or are pregnant
- When you are starting some forms of birth control
- When you need to have a Pap smear



## What happens before the exam?

Before the **pelvic exam**, your health care provider will ask questions about your general health. Common questions are:

- Have you had any surgeries?
- Have you had any major sickness?
- Do you have medicine allergies?
- What foods are you allergic to?
- Do you take medicine every day?



The provider will also ask personal questions about your sexual health. These questions are important and provide information needed to take care of you. Normal questions are:

- When was your last period?
- How often do you have your period?
- How many days do your periods last?
- Are you sexually active?
- How many sex partners do you have?
- Do you have any burning, itching or discharge from your vagina?

After your discussion with the provider, you will go to the exam room. There you will be given a gown and asked to undress. Be sure to empty your bladder so that the exam will be more comfortable.

## What should I expect during the exam?

**There are three parts to a pelvic exam:**

### 1. The External Exam

During the first part of the exam, the provider will carefully look at the outside of your vagina for rashes, discharge or anything that looks abnormal. It is important for you to let him/her know if you have had any discharge, bleeding, itching, sores or pain.

### 2. The Speculum Exam

During the second part, the provider will slowly place a small duck-billed instrument (speculum) into your vagina. You will feel a little pressure but it should not hurt. The speculum allows the provider to see the inside of your vagina. Usually the provider will collect samples to do a Pap smear. The Pap smear is a simple test used to detect changes in the cervix that can lead to cervical cancer.

### 3. The Bimanual Exam

After looking at your cervix and vagina and collecting needed samples, the provider will slowly take the speculum out. Again you may feel pressure, but it should not hurt. The provider will gently and slowly place two fingers into your vagina and push downward on your stomach with the other hand. This lets the provider check your cervix, uterus and ovaries to make sure they are healthy. You will feel the pressure from pushing, but it should not hurt. If it hurts, you should tell your provider.

Sometimes the exam includes a rectal exam. To do this exam the provider places one finger into your vagina and one finger into your rectum. This exam checks the health of your vagina and your rectum. Again you should feel pressure, but not pain.