**Women’s Health Dept, Hereford County Hospital**

**Patient information leaflet: YOUR COLPCOSCOPY APPOINTMENT**

## Why have I been referred for a colposcopy?

You have been asked to come for a further examination for one of the following reasons.

Your cervical screening test has found evidence of possible abnormal cells. These abnormal changes are known as **dyskaryosis.** This is not unusual, as about seven in every 100 cervical screening tests are reported as abnormal. Please try not to worry. The NHS Cervical Screening Programme aims to pick up these changes so that we can take action at an early stage. Please read the enclosed leaflet ‘Abnormal Cervical Smear Results’ which will explain this more fully.

One or more ‘inadequate’ samples*.* These cervical screening tests are not abnormal but the laboratory was not able to report your result. This is usually because there were not enough cells to assess. When this happens again and again, it is best to have a colposcopy to check that your cervix is healthy.

If you have had colposcopy treatment in the past and your recent cervical screening sample shows the presence of HPV, you will be asked to come back to colposcopy for assessment of your cervix.

Other signs or symptoms not related to having a cervical screening test but your doctor or nurse was concerned about symptoms that you have reported or the appearance of your cervix. The colposcopy clinic is the best place to have your cervix checked.

## Is there anything that I need to know before I have a colposcopy?

You can eat and drink as normal before your appointment.

There is no need to avoid having sex before you have a colposcopy examination, unless you have a coil fitted.

You may wish to take a normal dose of pain relieving tablets 1 hour before your appointment.

Bring a list of any medication you are taking and let the colposcopist know of any medical history or allergies.

Remember the date of your last period.

You will be asked to remove clothes below the waist. Because of this, you may find it more comfortable to wear a full skirt or dress, which you would not need to remove for the examination.

If you need treatment during your appointment, you may need to remove any vaginal piercings. It is important that you are aware of this so you can remove the jewellery before you come for your appointment.

After the examination, you may have some discharge from your vagina. Although we will provide pads, you are more than welcome to bring panty liners with you if you prefer.

You should be able to drive home afterwards but for car- insurance purposes, you should ask your colposcopist whether you are fit to drive after your treatment. We recommend that you bring someone with you in case you do not feel well after your appointment.

**What will happen during my appointment?**

When you arrive at the clinic, we will aim to see you as close to your appointment time as possible, but please be patient if there are delays that we could not have expected beforehand. You will then be called for your colposcopy, where you will meet the colposcopist (who may be a doctor or nurse) and the nurses who will be with you during the examination.

During your colposcopy appointment, the colposcopist will take down your medical history and explain the procedure to you. Following this, the colposcopist will carry out the examination. How long your appointment will take depends on whether any procedures are necessary but it is usually no longer than 20 minutes to half an hour.

## What is a colposcopy?

Having a colposcopy is similar to having a cervical screening test. You will lie on a special couch that has supports for your legs.

The colposcopist will lubricate a speculum and place it in your vagina (the same as when you had a cervical screening test). This will allow them to see your cervix.

The colposcope (which, put simply, is binoculars on a stand) gives the colposcopist an enlarged 3-D view of the cervix. **The colposcope does not enter the vagina.**

The colposcopist will put a liquid onto the cervix with a swab – this may be cold and sometimes sting a little. This liquid highlights any abnormal cells and allows the colposcopist to make a diagnosis.

If everything is normal the examination is complete.

However, if the colposcopist demonstrates an area of abnormality which may be CIN (please see the enclosed leaflet ‘Abnormal cervical smear results’ to understand this more fully) they may recommend that they take a **punch biopsy** or carry out **treatment.**

## What is a punch biopsy?

A **punch biopsy** is a tiny piece of tissue taken from the cervix and sent to a pathologist so that it can be examined closely to see if there are changes in the cells.

You will not normally need a local anaesthetic. The biopsy is about the size of a grain of rice.

You may have a brown or red discharge from your vagina for the next few days after this. You may also feel discomfort like period pain for the next few hours.

You should take your normal painkillers to ease this pain, but do not take more than recommended dose.

## What if I need treatment?

The aim of **treatment** is to remove abnormal cells and allow healthy cells to replace them. This is usually done as an outpatient in the colposcopy clinic on your first appointment, so you may want to arrange a fairly quiet day in case you are offered this.

If you have a coil fitted, please use an extra form of contraception for seven days before your appointment, as sometimes it is necessary to remove the coil before you have the treatment.

We perform a procedure called **Loop diathermy or LLETZ.** This treatment uses an electric current to remove abnormal tissue from your cervix.

A local anaesthetic (similar to that you would have at the dentist) is used to numb the cervix, and the abnormal cells are then lifted off the cervix using a wire loop.

The colposcopist will stop any bleeding that occurs prior to completing the procedure.

During the procedure, you will hear various noises from the machinery. The examination and treatment lasts roughly 15 minutes. Afterwards, you will be given a sanitary pad (or you may want to bring your own) and asked to rest for a short time before leaving.

## What normally happens after treatment?

Most women will feel okay after treatment. In **a very small** number of cases, the following may happen.

Some women feel dizzy or faint when they get up following the treatment. If this happens to you, the nurse will ask you to lie down and will keep you under close observation until you have fully recovered.

You may experience discomfort like period pain for the next few hours. You should take your normal painkillers to ease the pain but not take more than the recommended dose.

It is normal to have some bloodstained discharge after treatment. Please do **not** use tampons. Instead, use pads or panty liners. You should not use tampons until four weeks after the treatment. Do not worry if you do not have any discharge.

You should avoid heavy lifting or vigorous exercise for a day or so after treatment. You should also avoid swimming for at least two weeks or until the discharge has stopped because of the risk of infection.

If you have any questions after your treatment, please contact the colposcopy clinic 01432 364110

We aim to send you a letter with your results within 4 weeks. If you have not received this letter four weeks after your appointment, please contact the clinic.

## Possible problems with treatment

A small number of patients may suffer a pain in their pelvis or heavy bleeding from the treated area. This may happen immediately after treatment or within the next couple of weeks and may mean you have an infection, particularly if you have a temperature or strong-smelling discharge. It is very important that you contact your family doctor or failing that the colposcopy clinic as you may need another examination or antibiotics.

## Will I need to have check-ups?

Yes. It is important to keep your appointments to make sure that your cervix is healthy. We will tell you at the clinic or in the letter afterwards when we recommend the next one and where it should occur. The check-ups may be back at the colposcopy clinic or could be at your family doctor’s surgery. **It is very important to complete the follow-up programme as this allows us to check that your cervix stays healthy.**

## What should I do if I have a period on the day of my colposcopy?

Ring the clinic and check that you should go ahead with your appointment, as this often depends on what your appointment is for. If you feel awkward about having an examination during your period, contact the clinic and change the time of your appointment.

## What happens if I am pregnant or think I might be?

It is important that you keep your colposcopy appointment. A colposcopy can be carried out quite safely during pregnancy, but any biopsies or treatments will usually be postponed until after the baby is born. When you come for your appointment, we can talk to you more about this.

## What will the treatment show?

The technical term used to refer to cell changes confirmed by a biopsy or treatment is **cervical intra-epithelial neoplasia**, more commonly known as CIN.

**Will having a colposcopy affect my fertility or sex life?**

Having a colposcopy does not affect either of these. However, different treatments may have different effects and we will be happy to discuss this with you at your appointment. You may have a small increased risk of having slightly premature babies. If you have any treatment, you will have to avoid having sex for four weeks afterwards. If you have a special event coming up (for example, you are getting married or going on holiday very soon after your appointment), please contact the clinic and we will discuss whether it is necessary to rearrange your appointment.

## Further information.

There are many sources of information available on the intranet. We recommend: [www.bsccp.org.uk/women/frequently-asked-questions](http://www.bsccp.org.uk/women/frequently-asked-questions) [www.cancerscreening.nhs.ul/cervical](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.ul/cervical)

## Telephone

For more advice

## Women’s Health 01432 364 110

To discuss your appointment date and time

## Sara Harris 01432 262025