



# PAP TEST

## ***What is a Pap test?***

The Pap test (sometimes called a Pap smear) is a way to look at cells collected from the cervix (the lower end of the uterus).

## ***Why have a Pap test?***

The main reason to do a Pap test is to find strange cell changes that might be the beginning of cancer. This is a simple, painless test that can save your life. Between 60% and 80% of American women with newly diagnosed cervical cancer have not had a Pap test in the past 5 years, and many of these women have never had a Pap test.

## ***How is the Pap test done?***

Your health care provider collects the cells needed for the Pap test during your pelvic exam. A sample of cells is taken from the cervix with a wooden scraper and/or a small brush. This does not hurt at all. The collected cells are placed on a glass slide and preserved and then sent to a laboratory for examination. Your health care provider will have the results of the test within a few days and will let you know the results.

## ***How often should the Pap test be done?***

All women should start cervical cancer screening by the time they are 21 years old. Screening should be done every year during your yearly pelvic exam with the regular Pap test, or every 2 years using the newer liquid-based Pap test. Women ages 65 to 70 who have had at least 3 normal Pap tests and no abnormal Pap tests in the last 10 years may decide, after speaking with their health care provider, to stop having Pap tests. Women who have had a hysterectomy (surgery to remove the uterus and cervix) do not need to have a Pap test, unless the surgery was done as a treatment for cancer or precancer.

## ***How to prepare for the Pap test***

Try to schedule your pelvic exam/pap test when you are not having your period, because blood can interfere with the results of the test. If your bleeding is light, you may still be able to have a Pap test.

If you have symptoms such as bleeding after sex, get a Pap test as soon as you are able to schedule one.

Do not use douches, tampons, vaginal medicines, sprays or powders for at least 24 hours before having a Pap test.

No other special preparations are needed before having a Pap test.