

# Pap Tests

## What is a Pap test?

A Pap test or Pap smear checks for changes in the cells of the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the womb, which opens into the vagina. The test can find cancer cells, or cells that could turn into cancer.

## When should women start getting Pap tests?

All women should start getting Pap tests about 3 years after they first have vaginal sex. All women should be getting Pap tests by the time they are 21 years old.

## How is a Pap test done?

- A doctor or nurse inserts a speculum into the vagina to see the cervix.
- A doctor or nurse takes a sample of cells from inside and outside of the cervix.

## How to get ready for a Pap test:

For about 2 days before a Pap test, DO NOT:

- Have sex
- Douche
- Use tampons
- Use birth control that is put into the vagina, like foam, cream, or jelly
- Use any medicine that is put into the vagina

- Use a vaginal lubrication
- Use feminine deodorant sprays or powders
- Swim
- Take a tub bath

Do not have a Pap test if you are having your period. It can make it harder to find cells that are not normal. Call to change your appointment.

## How often should women get Pap tests?

A woman should talk with her doctor or nurse to decide how often to have Pap tests. How often a woman should have Pap tests is based on many things, including:

- Her age
- Results of pap tests in the past
- Medical history
- Having human papillomavirus (HPV)
- Smoking

## When should women stop getting Pap tests?

Women can stop getting a Pap test at 70 years old if the results of all Pap tests in the last 10 years were normal. All women over 70 should still have a pelvic exam every year.



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## What about women who have had a hysterectomy?

- Women who have had a partial hysterectomy still need to get Pap tests. This surgery takes out the womb (uterus) but NOT the cervix.
- Women who have had a total hysterectomy may stop getting Pap tests. This surgery takes out the womb and cervix.
- Even after stopping Pap smears, all women should get a pelvic exam every year.

FDA Office of Women's Health <http://www.fda.gov/womens>

## To Learn More:

### Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

[http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2004/104\\_cancer.html](http://www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2004/104_cancer.html)

### National Cancer Institute (NCI)

Cervical Cancer Home Page

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/types/cervical>

Phone: 1-800-4-CANCER 1-(800-422-6237)

TTY/TDD: 1-800-332-8615



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