

sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

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The HPV vaccine can reduce the chance of genital warts and cancers in both men and women. Many insurance plans cover the full cost of the vaccine.

Q What is a pap smear and how often should I get one?

A. Named after Greek scientist Dr. Georgios Papanikolaou, the Pap test is done during a pelvic exam by a medical provider. It is one of the most reliable and effective cancer screening tests available. A small sample of cells is gently collected from the cervix (at the opening to a woman's uterus) with a very tiny brush and placed in a vial. The cells are then sent to a laboratory for more testing. Originally, the sample of cells used to be "smearred" across a microscope slide – hence the name "pap smear."

The Pap test has been credited with drastically reducing deaths from cervical cancer and for many years was the main reason that women visited their doctor for yearly checkups. Testing guidelines recently changed and continue to evolve. The American Congress of Gynecology and Obstetrics currently recommends that **women should get a Pap test by age 21**. In addition, the group advises women under 30 to have a Pap test every 2 years. Women 30 years old and older, who have had 3 normal Pap tests for 3 years in a row, can space out their Pap test to every 3 years.

Many women are concerned when they learn

they have an "abnormal" Pap test. Best advice: stay calm. Abnormal does not mean cancer. It could mean an overgrowth (or undergrowth) of yeast cells, irritation from intercourse or tampon use, the presence of white blood cells, or cell growth that is termed "dysplasia." Dysplasia, from the Greek: "dys" means abnormal or impaired and "plasia" means cell growth.

Because it is a screening tool, a Pap test alone is not used to diagnose disease. An abnormal result identifies women who need further testing to identify what is happening on their cervix. Cervical dysplasia is almost always caused by HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) and will often get better without any treatment at all. Most abnormal pap tests will revert to normal within 1-2 years. Regular pap tests allow women to monitor their health and get treated early (**IF** needed) before abnormal cells progress to something more serious.



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