

Having a Pelvic Exam/Getting a Pap Smear Done

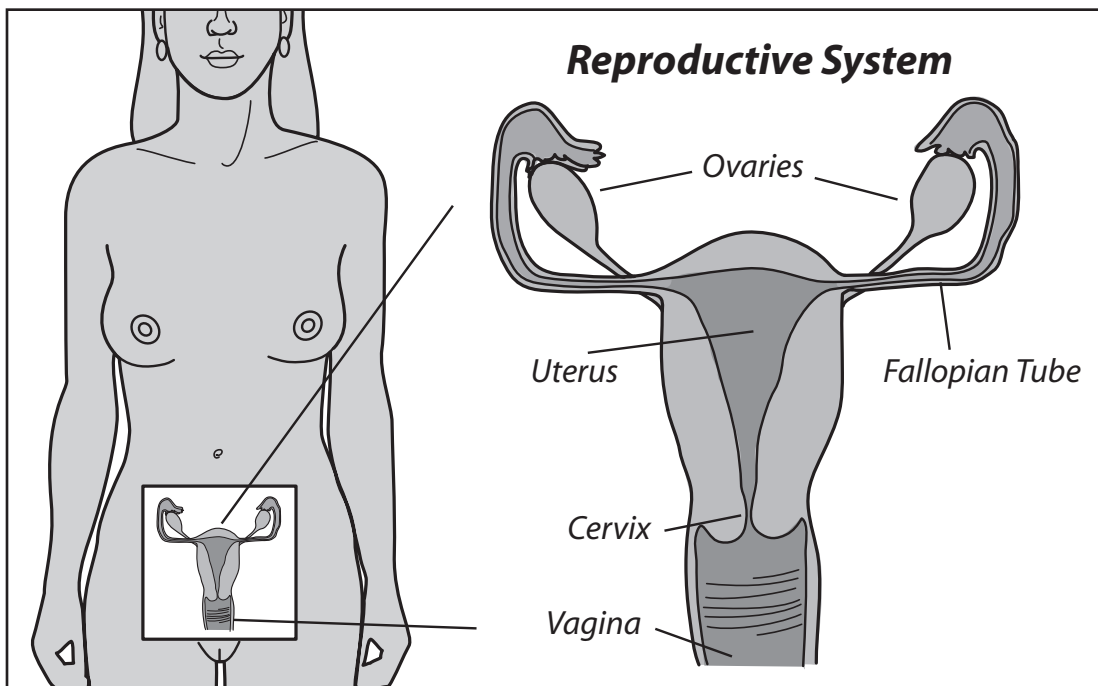
A pelvic exam is important for all women. It is performed by a health care provider to make sure your reproductive organs are healthy.

Pelvic exams are important because they allow health care providers to look for signs of cancer, sexually transmitted infections, and other infections.

It is recommended that all women have a pelvic exam by age 21 even if they are not sexually active. If you are younger

than 21 and already sexually active, you should start having pelvic exams within three years of when you first have sex. After your first pelvic exam, you should continue to have exams once a year; after several normal exams, you and your health care provider may decide to do them less often depending on your personal history.

In general, it is not required to have a pelvic exam or Pap smear to start birth control.



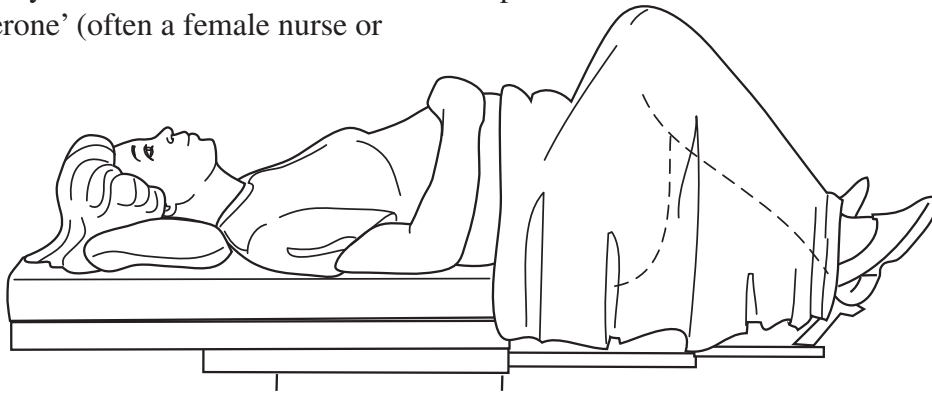
What To Expect During A Pelvic Exam

Before performing the pelvic exam, your doctor will ask about your health, including your menstrual and sexual history, use of birth control, and any medical problems or concerns you might have. Sometimes, a breast exam is done with a pelvic exam, so you will be asked to remove your underwear and bra and put on a cloth or paper gown.

During the pelvic exam, it is your choice whether you would like to have a 'chaperone' (often a female nurse or

staff member) present. Some women feel more comfortable having a chaperone, regardless of whether the provider is a male or female.

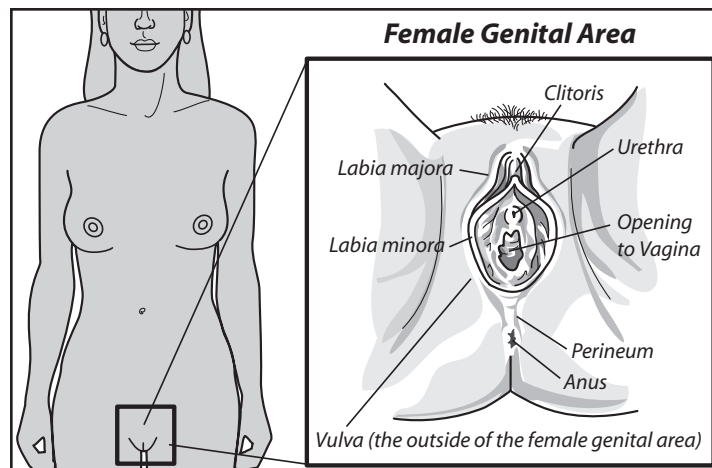
For the pelvic exam, you will be asked to lie on your back on an exam table with your knees bent and your feet against foot rests. You will then place your buttocks at the edge of the table and allow your knees to open and fall apart.



1. The External Exam

The provider will first do a visual exam of the vulva (the outside or opening of the vagina), looking for things like rashes, sores, abnormal marks, or vaginal

discharge. Using a gloved hand, he or she will also feel for any bumps or tenderness on the outside of the vagina.



2. The Speculum Exam

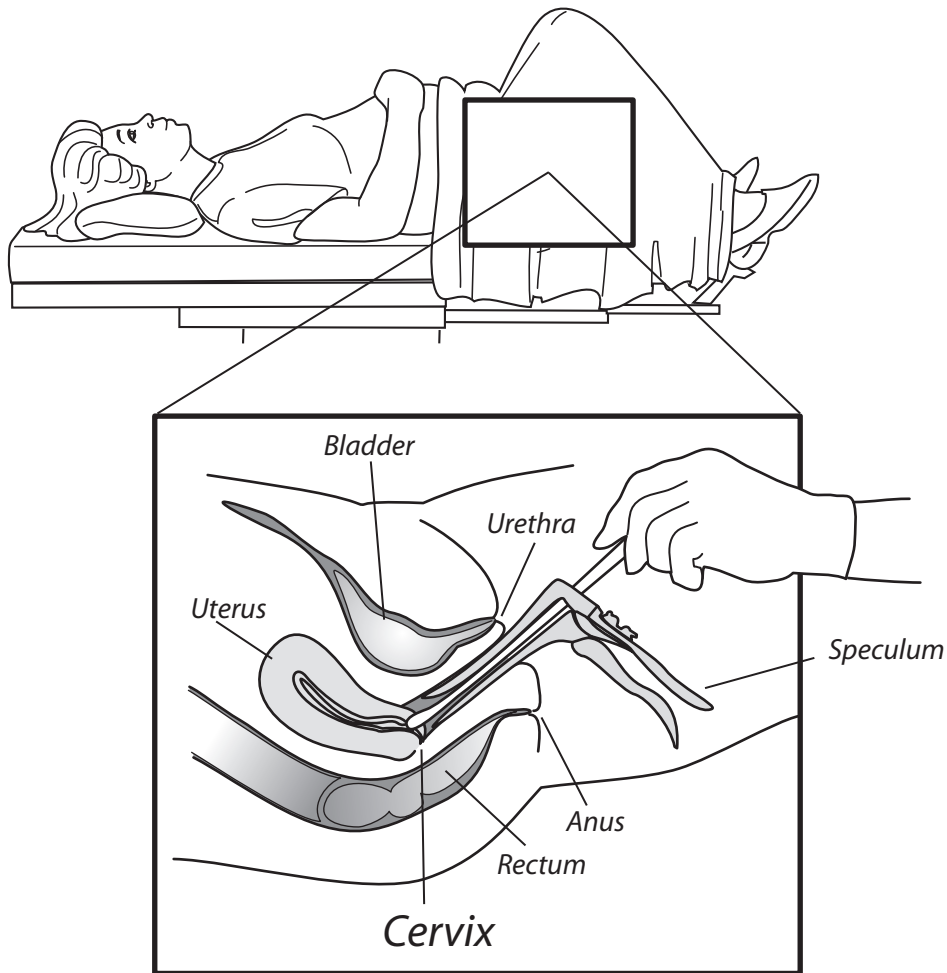
After the exam of the vulva, your provider will insert a plastic or metal instrument called a speculum inside the vagina to look at the cervix (opening to the womb or uterus) and vagina. The speculum will be held open. It will feel like pressure against your rectum.

In preparation for a Pap test...

- Schedule your Pap smear appointment between 10 and 20 days after the first day of your last period.
- It's best to avoid sexual intercourse, douching, or using any vaginal jelly, foam or cream for 2 days before getting a Pap test, so that the test can be as accurate as possible.

In addition, the provider may use a soft brush to take a sample of cells from the cervix. This is called a Pap test (or Pap smear). The purpose of the Pap test is to look for signs of cervical cancer or

pre-cancer. The provider may also use a cotton swab to test for sexually transmitted infections (such as chlamydia and gonorrhea). This will not hurt.

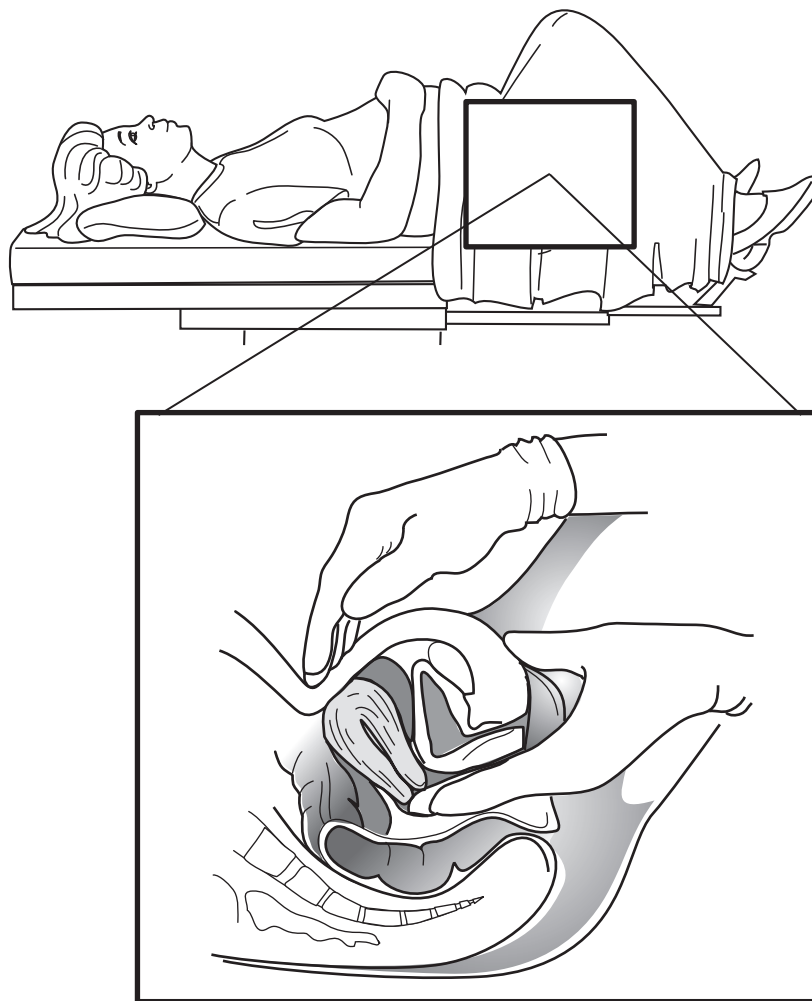


Pap Smear of the Cervix

3. The Manual Exam

The last part of the exam is a manual exam. To do the manual exam, the provider will insert one or two gloved fingers into the vagina (lubricated with a water-based jelly to be more comfortable for you) and will use the other hand on the outside of the belly to feel the uterus, cervix, and ovaries. The provider will do this to feel if all the organs are normal or not (for example, enlarged, tender, etc.).

With this part of the exam, women with some infections may feel some tenderness and this can help the provider diagnose an infection. Finally, providers may also feel the rectum and other parts of the genital area by inserting a gloved, lubricated finger in the anus and using the other hand to press on the belly.



The Pelvic Exam—Manual Exam

Additional Information About the Pelvic Exam

Most women are able to have a pelvic exam without much discomfort. However, for some women, the exam can be uncomfortable.

Deep breathing and relaxation help many women to have a pelvic exam with as little discomfort as possible. The whole exam takes less than 5 minutes.

Do ask your provider about any questions or concerns you may have— write them down in advance if this will help you remember them.

Your provider should tell you when the test results will be back. Make an appointment to get the results, or ask if your provider sends the results by mail instead. Being sure to get the results is one important way to take charge of your health.