

# Having Your First Pelvic Exam

## What is a pelvic exam?

A pelvic exam is when a woman's reproductive organs (see Figure 1) are examined by a healthcare provider to make sure they are healthy.

During a pelvic exam you might be checked for:

- the health of the reproductive organs
- sores and lumps on the genitals
- sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- infections in the vagina (e.g., yeast or bacterial vaginosis)

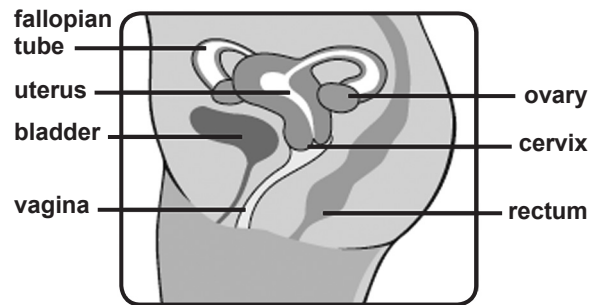


Figure 1

## Why should I have a pelvic exam done?

It is important to have regular pelvic exams. During your exam, a Pap test may be done, which looks for abnormal changes on the opening of the uterus (cervix) that may lead to cervical cancer. Women die from cervical cancer every year, often because changes are found too late.

STIs that don't get treated can damage the reproductive organs. This damage can prevent you from getting pregnant. The tests for STIs are not the same as a Pap test.

## What happens during a pelvic exam?

A pelvic exam takes about 5 minutes. You might feel pressure during the exam, but it shouldn't hurt.

1. You will get undressed from the waist down (underwear off). You will get a sheet to cover yourself.
2. An instrument called a speculum is gently put in the vagina. The speculum makes it easier to see the vagina and cervix.
3. Samples of cells or vaginal fluid might be taken for the Pap and/or STI tests.
4. Your healthcare provider will feel the shape and position of the reproductive organs.

You might have some light bleeding (spotting) from the vagina after a pelvic exam.

## How do I get a pelvic exam?

See your healthcare provider for a pelvic exam. You might need to make an appointment. Before your appointment, write down any questions you have and bring them with you to the appointment.

Tell your healthcare provider:

- when your last period started
- if you are pregnant or think you might be
- if you take any medicine (e.g., birth control)
- if you want STI testing (it might not be done unless you ask)
- about any concerns (e.g., changes in vaginal discharge, bleeding between periods, pain during or after sex)

Ask when to come back for another pelvic exam and how often you need a Pap test done. Get tested regularly.

Come back for STI testing when you change sexual partners or have any concerns.

### **Did You Know**

- You have the right to make the decision to have sex or not.
- Plan ahead and decide to protect yourself to lower your risk of pregnancy, STIs, and HIV.
- It is important to talk with your partner about how you can protect each other.
- Use a condom **every time** you have sex (vaginal, oral, anal) to lower your risk of STIs and HIV.
- Think about getting **emergency contraception** to help prevent pregnancy if you have had unprotected intercourse or didn't use your method of birth control the right way.

### **Websites**

[www.myhealth.alberta.ca](http://www.myhealth.alberta.ca)

[www.sexualityandu.ca](http://www.sexualityandu.ca)

[www.teachingsexualhealth.ca](http://www.teachingsexualhealth.ca)

[www.albertahealthservices.ca](http://www.albertahealthservices.ca) and search for Sexual and Reproductive Health

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link Alberta at 403-943-LINK (5465) in the Calgary area, 780-408-5465 in the Edmonton area, or 1-866-408-LINK (5465) toll-free.

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