

Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure

Loop electrosurgical excision procedure (LEEP) is a treatment to remove precancerous **cells** from the **cervix**. Removing precancerous cells helps stop them from developing into **cervical cancer**. Infection with **human papillomavirus (HPV)** is the main risk factor for cell changes on the cervix.

This pamphlet explains

- how HPV affects the cervix
- how LEEP is performed
- risks of the procedure
- what to expect during your recovery
- how to stay healthy

How HPV Affects the Cervix

HPV is a common **sexually transmitted infection (STI)**. In most people who have HPV, the **immune system** clears the virus from the body. In other cases, HPV can linger and change normal cells into abnormal cells. Over time, and without treatment, abnormal cells can turn to cancer. The **Pap test** checks for abnormal cells in the cervix. This allows for early treatment so the changes caused by HPV do not become cervical cancer.

How LEEP Is Performed

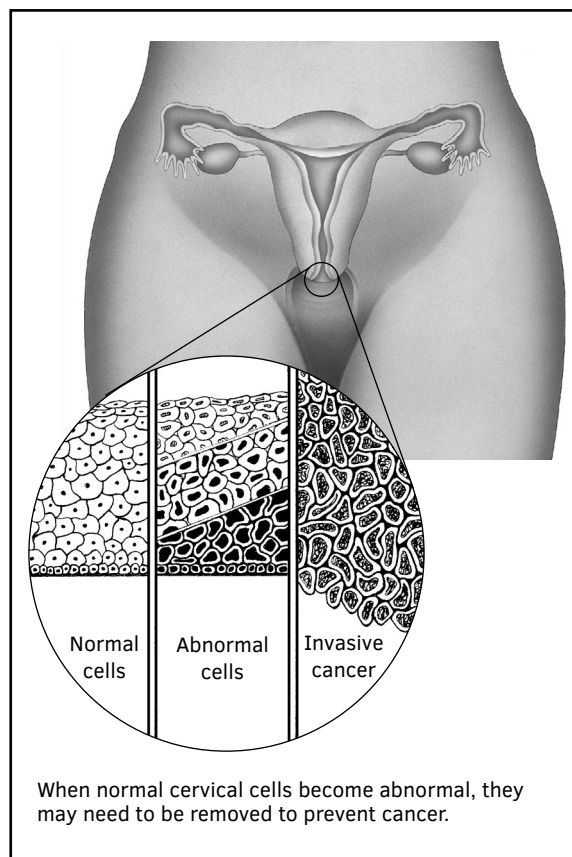
LEEP is one way to remove abnormal cells from the cervix. The procedure uses a small wire loop that is attached to an electrical current. When the loop is passed over cervical tissue, it cuts away a layer of abnormal cells. The removed tissue is sent to a lab for testing.

The procedure should be done when you are not having your **menstrual period** to give a better view of the cervix. In most cases, LEEP is done in the office of an **obstetrician-gynecologist (ob-gyn)**. The procedure takes a few minutes.

To start the procedure, you will lie on an exam table and place your legs in stirrups. Your ob-gyn will insert a **speculum** into your **vagina** in the same way as for a **pelvic exam**. Your ob-gyn may use a **colposcope** to better see the cervix. Local **anesthesia** may be used to numb the cervix. Your ob-gyn also may apply a vinegar solution to the cervix to see the abnormal cells better. Application of this solution or the numbing medication may sting.

The loop is inserted through the speculum and passed over the cervix to cut away abnormal tissue. You may feel pressure, a dull ache, or a cramp. Some women feel faint during the procedure. If you feel faint, tell your ob-gyn. After the abnormal cells have been removed, a special paste may be applied to the cervix to stop any bleeding.

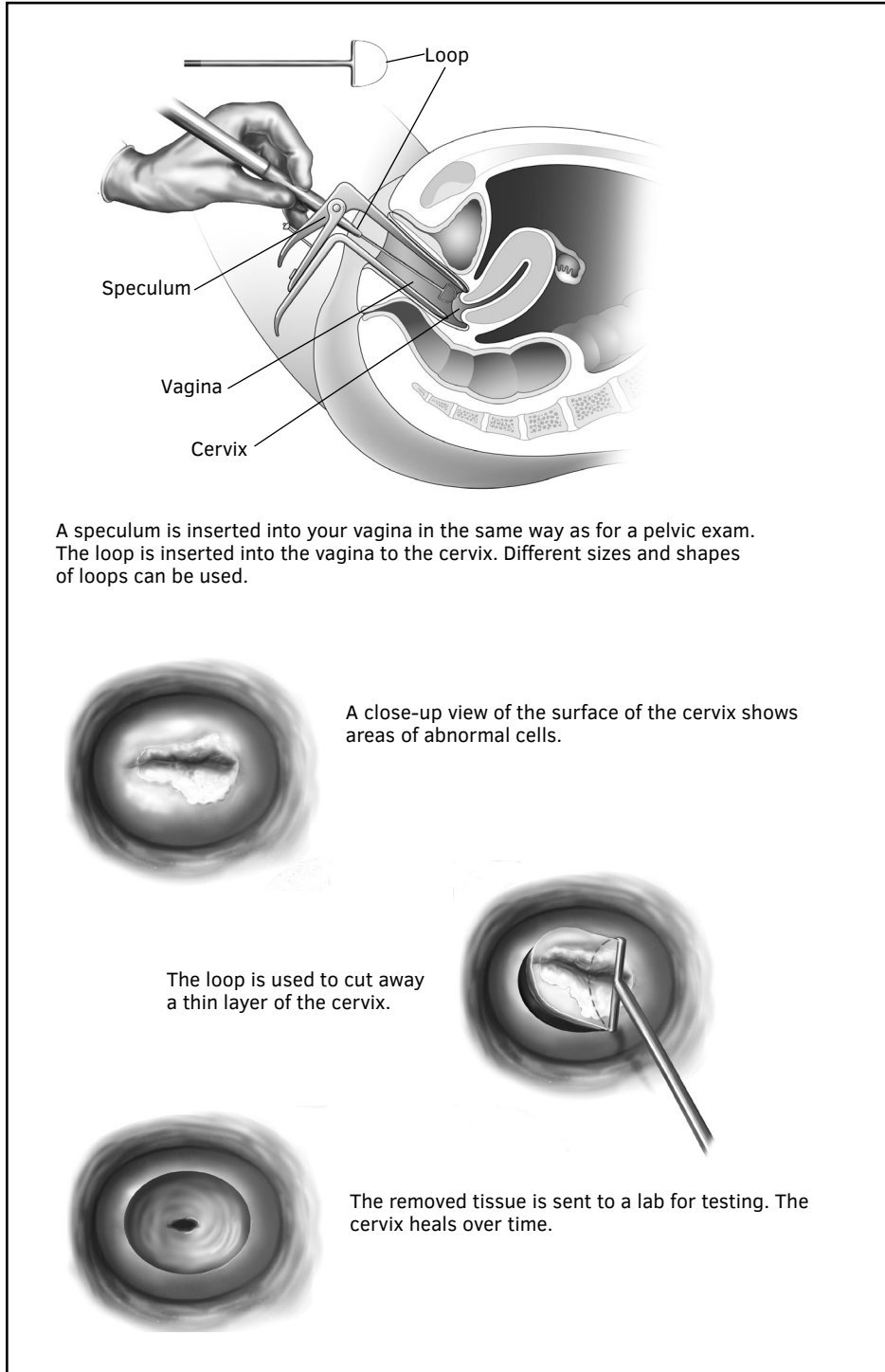
The tissue that is removed will be sent to a lab. Your ob-gyn should let you know the results when the testing is complete.



Risks

The most common risk in the first 3 weeks after a LEEP is heavy bleeding. If you have heavy bleeding, call your ob-gyn. You may need to have more of the paste applied to the cervix to stop it.

LEEP may be associated with an increased risk of future pregnancy problems. Although most women have no problems, there is a small increase in the risk of premature births and having a low birth weight baby. In rare cases, the cervix is narrowed after the procedure. This narrowing may cause problems with *menstruation*.



Your Recovery

After the procedure, you may have

- a watery, pinkish discharge
- mild cramping
- a brownish-black discharge (from the paste used)

It will take a few weeks for your cervix to heal. While your cervix heals, you should not place anything in the vagina, such as tampons or douches. You should not have *sexual intercourse*. Your ob-gyn should tell you when it is safe to do so.

You should contact your ob-gyn if you have any of the following problems:

- Heavy bleeding (more than your normal period)
- Bleeding with clots
- Severe abdominal pain

Staying Healthy

After the procedure, you will need to see your ob-gyn for follow-up visits. You will have tests to be sure that the abnormal cells are gone and that they have not returned. If you have another abnormal test result, you may need more treatment.

You can help protect the health of your cervix by following these guidelines:

- Have regular pelvic exams and screening tests for cervical cancer.
- Stop smoking—smoking increases your risk of cancer of the cervix.
- Limit your number of sexual partners and use condoms to reduce your risk of STIs.

Finally...

LEEP is an effective and simple way to remove abnormal cells from the cervix. The procedure can be done comfortably in your ob-gyn's office. Recovery time is brief in most cases. Like all procedures, LEEP carries some risks. It is important to understand all of the risks, as well as the benefits, before having the procedure.

Glossary

Anesthesia: Relief of pain by loss of sensation.

Cells: The smallest units of a structure in the body. Cells are the building blocks for all parts of the body.

Cervical Cancer: A type of cancer that is in the cervix, the opening to the uterus at the top of the vagina.

Cervix: The lower, narrow end of the uterus at the top of the vagina.

Colposcope: A special magnifying instrument used to examine the cervix, vagina, and vulva.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): The name for a group of related viruses, some of which cause genital warts and some of which are linked to cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, mouth, and throat.

Immune System: The body's natural defense system against viruses and bacteria that cause disease.

Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure (LEEP): A procedure that removes abnormal tissue from the cervix using a thin wire loop and electric energy.

Menstrual Period: The monthly shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus.

Menstruation: The monthly shedding of blood and tissue from the uterus that happens when a woman is not pregnant.

Obstetrician–Gynecologist (Ob-Gyn): A doctor with special training and education in women's health.

Pap Test: A test in which cells are taken from the cervix (or vagina) to look for signs of cancer.

Pelvic Exam: A physical examination of a woman's pelvic organs.

Sexual Intercourse: The act of the penis of the male entering the vagina of the female. Also called "having sex" or "making love."

Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs): Infections that are spread by sexual contact. Infections include chlamydia, gonorrhea, human papillomavirus (HPV), herpes, syphilis, and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [AIDS]).

Speculum: An instrument used to hold open the walls of the vagina.

Vagina: A tube-like structure surrounded by muscles. The vagina leads from the uterus to the outside of the body.

This information is designed as an educational aid for the public. It offers current information and opinions related to women's health. It is not intended as a statement of the standard of care. It does not explain all of the proper treatments or methods of care. It is not a substitute for the advice of a physician. For ACOG's complete disclaimer, visit www.acog.org/WomensHealth-Disclaimer.

Copyright December 2021 by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, posted on the internet, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

This is EP110 in ACOG's Patient Education Pamphlet Series

ISSN 1074-8601

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
409 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20024-2188