

Well Woman Exam Patient Education:

What Happens During A Pelvic Exam?

This is when a doctor checks the vulva, vagina, and reproductive organs. It is also called a "GYN Exam." You might get a pelvic exam when you see your regular doctor. Or you might see a gynecologist or other specialist in women's health. A nurse practitioner or midwife can also do a pelvic exam. A pelvic exam involves 2 main parts:

- Questions and discussion
- Physical exam

When Might I Need A Pelvic Exam?

Doctors recommend getting a pelvic exam at different times. These include:

- As part of a regular check-up – Your doctor will talk to you about whether you should get regular pelvic exams, and how often. This will depend on your age, health, and preferences.
- To find the cause of symptoms – Examples include changes in vaginal discharge, very heavy periods or bleeding between periods, pelvic pain, or leaking urine.
- For cervical cancer screening – This involves looking for cancer cells in the cervix. It can be done with a "Pap test," an "HPV test," or both.
- To check for some sexually transmitted infections, or "STIs"
- Before or during placement an IUD – An IUD is a type of birth control.
- At your first "prenatal" visit if you are pregnant

What Questions Will the Doctor Ask?

The doctor will ask for your permission to do a pelvic exam. They will also talk with you and ask you questions. Your answers will help them give you the best care possible. Your doctor might ask you other questions, too. For example, they might ask about your emotional health and whether you feel safe at home. For some people, it can feel awkward or embarrassing to talk about sex or their bodies. But it's important to be honest so you can get the care you need.

What Happens During A Pelvic Exam?

For the exam, you will be asked to undress from the waist down or put on a hospital gown. You will lie on an exam table with your feet raised. Often, you will be asked to place your feet in footrests. There are several parts to the physical exam:

- External exam – This means looking at your vulva from the outside. The vulva is the area around the opening of the vagina. The doctor will look for any problems, like signs of irritation or infection.
- Speculum exam – A "speculum" is a device the doctor uses to see inside your vagina. They will use lubricant to help insert it gently. This lets them look at the inside of your vagina and at your cervix. They can also use small tools to check for cervical cancer.
- Internal exam – The doctor will put 1 hand on your belly. With their other hand, they will put 1 or 2 gloved fingers into your vagina. This lets them feel your cervix, uterus, and ovaries.

The doctor might also look at and feel your belly and breasts. They will check for any changes, problems, or pain.

What Else Should I know?

- A pelvic exam should **not** hurt. But it can be uncomfortable. The doctor will tell you what they are doing at each step so you know what to expect. If you have discomfort, you can ask the doctor to stop the exam anytime. They might suggest things that can help, like using a smaller speculum. Or they can use 1 finger to feel inside your vagina instead of 2.
- Tell your doctor ahead of time if you have a lot of pain or anxiety related to pelvic exams. They can talk to you about your options.
- You can choose to have someone else in the room during your exam, if this makes you feel more comfortable. This might be a partner, family member, or nurse.

To schedule an appointment please call 1-888-296-GPHA (4742)