

THE SPEEDWELL PRACTICE



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Everything you wanted to know about cervical screening but didn't know who to ask!

Q: Do I need a smear if I feel completely fine?

A: Yes. Cervical screening tests for a virus called HPV, which is linked to most (99.8%) cases of cervical cancer. Most women who have HPV don't know they have it as it usually doesn't cause any symptoms. This is what the screening is for- to 'catch' the virus in those who feel completely fine.

Q: Do I really need a smear test if I've been vaccinated against HPV? A: Yes. The HPV vaccine is excellent and has prevented thousands of cases of cervical cancer in the UK alone at this point. Unfortunately though, even though your risk of catching HPV if you are vaccinated is a lot lower, it is not zero. So, we would still recommend having the smear done.

Q: Do I need a smear test if I'm in a long-term relationship?

A: Yes. Although the most common way to get HPV is through sexual contact, it is possible to get it through any close skin-to-skin contact, so it's better to get it checked out to be sure.

Q: Do I need a smear test if I've never had sex?

A: Without getting too personal, any intimate skin-to-skin contact can spread HPV. So any activity with another person that involves skin-to-skin touch can pass HPV, even if you don't 'go all the way'. You get the idea. And if you're not sure if it counts, it's better to get the smear just to be sure.

Q: But isn't cervical screening for very promiscuous people, really? A: No! You can have one intimate skin-to-skin contact in your life and get HPV. That would be quite unlucky, but not extremely unlucky, as this virus is actually quite common- 80% of women will have it at some point in their lives.

Q: Do I need a smear test if I'm gay?

A: Yes. Women who have sex with women are at exactly the same risk of catching HPV as women who have sex with men. It all boils down to the way it's passed on- through intimate skin-to-skin contact, regardless of whose skin it is.

Q: Do I need a smear test if I always use protection?

A: Unless the protection you're using covers the whole skin of both your

intimate areas like latex biker shorts then yes. Remember, it's the skin-to-skin contact.



Q: I'm really embarrassed, though! Any advice?

A: All the nurses doing the smears in our clinic are female. You can choose to have or not have a female chaperone present. You can also bring someone (your mum, sister, best friend) for moral support. But at the end of the day, remember we do this day in and day out and there is really nothing we haven't seen before!

Q: Isn't it VERY painful?

A: Different people have different pain thresholds, so it would be bold to say it doesn't hurt at all (though there are people who have had it and say just that!). However, by all means it should not be VERY painful. If you had a speculum exam before (where a doctor or a nurse puts a plastic cone-shaped device to look inside you), then this is the worst bit and it will not hurt a lot more than that. Also, it's VERY quick, so it will be over before you know it and you are done for 3 years!

Q: Do you have any good resources I can have a read through for more information?

A: Of course! Let's start here. <https://www.jostrust.org.uk/information>
<https://patient.info/cancer/gynaecological-cancer/cervical-screening-cervical-smear-test#:~:text=Cervical%20screening%20is%20a%20free%20service%20on%20the,is%20sent%20six%20months%20before%20a%2025th%20birthday.>

If you are apprehensive about getting a smear due to difficult past experiences have a look here:

<https://mybodybackproject.com/cervical-screening-clinics/>

Q: You said this is everything I wanted to know about cervical screening, but I have a question that's not on here!

A: Our nurses are always happy to answer any questions you may have about why we do the screening, what it actually involves and what the results mean. And it's ok to book an appointment to discuss it, get to know them and then go home to have a think about it for a bit longer or decide not to go through with it in the end! Just have a chat with our reception team and we can book you in.