

With the exception of visible sores caused by the herpes virus, most sexually transmitted diseases cannot be seen during self-exam. Chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis - all these STI's need to be tested by a clinician and require prescription medication.

Pregnancy and Cervical Exam

When a woman is pregnant, the cervix appears blue, bluish or purple.

So, why self-exam?

To claim our bodies for ourselves.

Self-exam can be done individually or in a group where the experience can be shared with friends. Some women do it everyday, some once a week and some only occasionally. However you do it, self-exam can be a transformative experience.

Self-exam can be more than simply knowing the size and shape of our cervix. It can be a tool to self-discovery and empowerment. To know what was once unknown, to shed light on what was once hidden, and to have a sense of ownership of and ability to care for our bodies can change our lives. It's about helping ourselves to health.

Resources

This information is excerpted and adapted from the Feminist Women's Health Center website.

www.fwhc.org

www.pffc.ca

www.ourbodiesourselves.org

Venus Envy is an education oriented sex shop and bookstore. Our goal is to provide women and their partners a respectful (and fun!) place where they can find toys and tools to explore their gender and sexuality.

We believe that one of the best tools you can have to enjoy a healthy and erotic sex life is knowledge. To that end, we've developed this series of pamphlets. They are based on our workshops and on the information sheets displayed in our stores.

Our goal is to make positive sex information available to everybody! Our pamphlet series covers many aspects of sex, sexuality, health and relationships. They are always evolving, with new topics being added all the time. We welcome any comments and suggestions that you may have.

VENUS ENVY

1598 barrington street, halifax.

902 422 0004

320 lisgar street, ottawa

613 789 4646

www.venusenvy.ca



This material may be copied or re-used according to the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial license. See www.venusenvy.ca/licensing for details.



It's okay to peek

Knowledge is power.

Learn how to do a
gynecological self-exam

VENUS ENVY
books ✦ sex ✦ health

Why Cervical/Vaginal self-exam?

The purpose of self-exam is to learn more about how our bodies work, what's normal and what's not. self-exam offers women the ability to see the normal changes our bodies go through and notice the markers of potential problems. As our knowledge grows, we take back the power to care for ourselves.

Why is the cervix so important?

As the opening to the uterus, it is the cervix through which menstrual blood flows, babies are born, and pregnancies are terminated. Several methods of birth control work by placing a barrier over the cervix and keeping sperm out. When a woman ovulates, cervical fluid has a distinctive texture and appearance. With the aid of a speculum, viewing the cervix can be easy.

3 Easy Steps to self-exam

To do self-exam, you need a speculum, mirror and flashlight.

You may also want a water-based lubricant, such as Probe or Slippery Stuff, to make inserting the speculum more comfortable. Avoid anything with an oil-base, as this could upset your vaginal microcosm. Lean back against a pile of pillows on a bed or couch.

After you've practiced opening and closing the speculum, put some lube on its bills (the rounded ends that look like duck bills and that are inserted into the vagina). Let your knees fall out to the sides and relax. To insert the speculum, hold it in one hand, handle up, bills together. Use your other hand to open your labia, or lips of your vagina. Remember, YOU are in control; make yourself as comfortable as you want. Some women prefer to insert the speculum sideways, and then turn the handle up. Go slow, and stop to relax if it is uncomfortable.

Slide the speculum in as far as it will comfortably go, squeeze the handles together. This opens the bills, stretches the vaginal walls and allows you to see your cervix. Hold the handles together, and slide the short handle down and the long handle up. When you hear a click, the speculum is locked open. With it locked, both hands are free so you can hold a mirror and flashlight. Shine the beam of the flashlight into the mirror and it will reflect into your vagina. Now you can see your cervix and vagina. (If you can't see it, close the bills of the speculum, change the direction they are pointed in, and try again. If after a few tries, you still don't see it, stop and try a few days later. The cervix can move a little throughout the menstrual cycle and it may be easier in a few days.)

Remove the speculum by closing the bills (unlocking the speculum) and slide the speculum out. Again, some women prefer to turn it sideways.

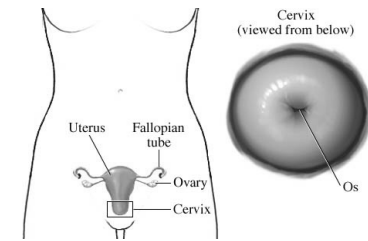
After using, just wash it with soap and water. Don't boil a plastic speculum. Store it in a clean place and don't share it with others.

Self-exam does not replace annual professional pelvic exam.

What's Normal

Your cervix may look like a rounded or flattened knob, about the size of a quarter or fifty-cent piece, with a hole or slit in it. The hole, called the "os", is the opening to your uterus (womb). Your cervix might be pink and smooth, or it may have some reddish blemishes. It can be uneven, rough, or splotchy. The os may look round, straight, curved, open or closed.

The cervix produces fluid which is usually creamy or white and does not have a strong odour. These secre-



tions are normal. Fertile mucous is clear, sticky and stretchy. Daily tracking allows a woman to identify when she's fertile and to use this information to avoid or encourage pregnancy.

Your cervix may have fluid-filled blister-like sacs on it. These are normal and are caused by a blockage in the mucous-producing glands of the cervix. In some women, they come and go while other women have them for years. You may see polyps, outgrowths of tissue which dangle on a stalk and protrude through the os. They may bleed easily but do not need to be removed unless they bother you.

What's Not Normal

The following signs may indicate an infection: green, gray or dark yellow discharge, any significant change in the amount or consistency of cervical fluid any strong odour unusual for you

You may choose to seek care from a clinician if you suspect an infection. Some infections, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea, can cause serious complications if left untreated. Other conditions may be easily addressed with natural remedies.

A "yeast infection" is an overgrowth of natural vaginal yeast. It can cause a white, cottage cheese-like discharge and usually causes uncomfortable itching. There are many ways to curb yeast overgrowth, including garlic vaginal suppositories, yogurt douches, herbal or natural treatments as well as over-the-counter medications.