

Education

Cervicitis

What is cervicitis?

Cervicitis is inflammation of the cervix. The cervix is the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina. Babies develop in the uterus, and menstrual blood comes from the uterus, through the cervix.

How does it occur?

Infections by bacteria or viruses are common causes of cervicitis. Usually the infections are transmitted by sexual contact. Examples of such infections are gonorrhea, genital herpes, chlamydia, and human papillomavirus (HPV).

Sexual intercourse, injury during childbirth, or surgery may cause the cervix to become inflamed or infected.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of cervicitis may include:

- a vaginal discharge with an odor or a discharge that is a different color from what is normal for you
- discomfort or pain in the lower abdomen, especially during sexual intercourse
- bleeding or spotting from the vagina after intercourse
- bleeding or spotting from the vagina between menstrual periods.
- itching, burning, or painful urination.

Cervicitis often has no symptoms. You may not know you have cervicitis until you have a pelvic exam. During the exam your health care provider may see redness or swelling, a discharge from the cervix, or other signs of cervicitis.

How is it diagnosed?

If you think you may have cervicitis, see your health care provider when you are not having a menstrual period. Also:

- For 5 days before you see your provider, do not use any vaginal medicine.
- For 2 days before you see your provider, do not use a tampon or diaphragm.

When you see your provider, he or she will ask about your symptoms. You will have a physical exam, including a pelvic exam. Your provider will use swabs to get a sample of discharge and cells from your cervix for lab tests.

Your provider may also:

- Do a Pap test.
- Do a biopsy of the cervix (cutting tiny pieces of tissue from the cervix for lab tests).
- Test samples of your blood to check for hepatitis B virus and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

A biopsy may be done as part of an exam called a colposcopy. This is an exam in which your health care provider uses a magnifying instrument to look at the cervix. A colposcopy may also be done if a Pap test or biopsied tissue is abnormal.

How is it treated?

Cervicitis caused by bacteria or a virus is treated with antibiotics or antiviral medicines.

If medicines do not cure the cervicitis, the tissue in the inflamed area may be destroyed or removed with:

- electrocautery (burning with an electric current)
- cryotherapy (freezing)
- LEEP (loop electrosurgical excision procedure)
- laser treatment
- a surgical knife.

You can have these procedures as an outpatient. They have few complications or side effects.

Treatment is important to help prevent the spread of the infection to other organs and to your sex partner. If a sexually transmitted disease caused the cervicitis, your partner must also take medicine.

How long will the effects last?

Mild cervicitis usually is gone by the time you have taken all the medicine. The symptoms of more severe cervicitis may last a month or two, even with treatment.

Rarely, the infection may spread to the lining of the uterus or to the fallopian tubes. These infections could cause pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) or infertility. They usually result from infections of gonorrhea or chlamydia.

How can I take care of myself?

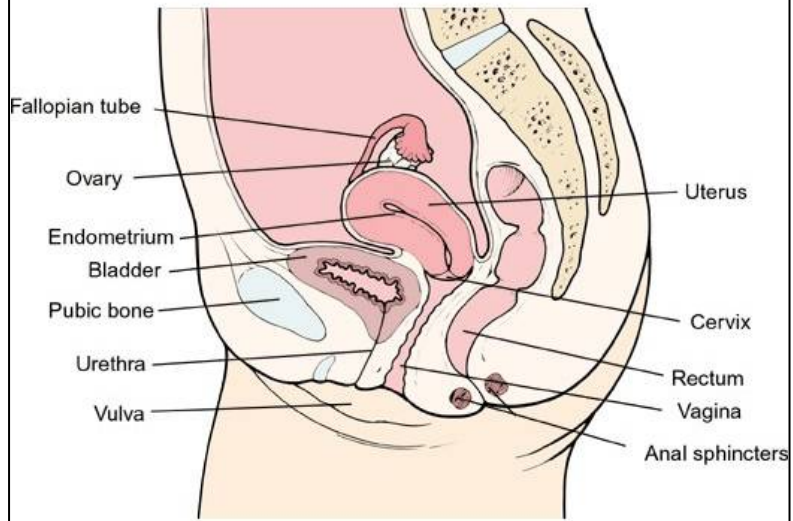
- Take all of your prescribed medicine, even if you have no symptoms. Cervicitis can become a more severe, long-term problem if it is not treated long enough to heal completely.
- Keep your genital area clean but do not douche unless your health care provider says you should.
- Do not have intercourse until your provider tells you it is OK.
- Use sanitary pads instead of tampons when you have menstrual periods during your treatment.
- Keep your follow-up appointments with your health care provider.

What can be done to help prevent cervicitis?

- Have just 1 sexual partner who is not sexually active with anyone else.
- Always use a latex or polyurethane condom during vaginal, oral, or anal intercourse, especially if you or your partner have sex with others.

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Female Pelvis: Side View



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