

Fact Sheet

Cervix - Treatment after Abnormal Pap Test (LLETZ)

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Abnormal cells commonly develop on the cervix (lower part of the uterus or womb).

- Often they are minor ('low grade') – these tend to go away by themselves.
- However, at other times they are more serious ('high grade'). In these cases, simple treatment is usually needed to remove the abnormal cells.

These cells are not cancer but may be pre-cancer, the changes that occur before cancer.

- In some cases they can develop into cancer but this happens very slowly and usually takes about 10 years, sometimes longer.
- This gives plenty of time to treat the cells and prevent them from becoming cancer.

A common treatment is LLETZ which stands for 'large loop excision of the transformation zone' of the cervix.

- The transformation zone is the area on the cervix where abnormal cells usually form.
- The 'loop' is thin hot wire (diathermy) loop which is used to lift away the abnormal cells from the surface of the cervix (after giving you some anaesthetic). After this, the cervix usually grows healthy normal skin where the abnormal cells have been.

Your gynaecologist will generally advise you to have LLETZ treatment if high grade abnormal cells have been found on your pap smear and colposcopy. (see also *Fact Sheet on Pap Smear*)

Occasionally, other treatment may be advised (see also *Fact Sheet on Cone Biopsy*)



What are the benefits of a LLETZ procedure?

LLETZ treatment is

- a simple, fast procedure that generally only takes a few minutes
- minor surgery and generally a very safe procedure
- very successful (almost 100%) in removing pre-cancerous cells and in preventing you from developing cancer of the cervix

A LLETZ procedure usually takes only 5 – 10 minutes.

It can be done in the outpatient clinic under local anaesthetic (an injection to numb the cervix) or under a general anaesthetic where you are asleep in the operating theatre.

Your gynaecologist will discuss with you which would be the better choice in your case.

Are there any risks with a LLETZ procedure?

While LLETZ is generally a very safe procedure, no operation is completely without risk. Since LLETZ is recommended to prevent women from developing cancer, the benefits of the surgery are much greater than the risks.

Risks can be described as those which can happen

- with any surgery
- because of the LLETZ procedure itself.

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The general risks of surgery

Because LLETZ is such a small procedure, the general risks of surgery are rare but can include anaesthetic risks or infections of bladder or lungs.

The special risks of LLETZ itself

- Heavy bleeding from the cervix can occasionally happen
 - at the time of the procedure – this is not common and your gynaecologist will use treatments to stop it
 - a week or two after the procedure - this bleeding may be due to infection. It is usually treated by applying pressure to the cervix and giving antibiotics; in a few cases the bleeding may be heavy enough that suturing (stitching) in the operating theatre is needed; rarely a blood transfusion may be necessary
- Rarely, tiny skin burns to the vagina or just outside the vagina occur from the hot wire loop; these usually heal well and without scarring
- In a few cases, not all the abnormal cells are removed and you may need to have a further LLETZ treatment in a few months.
- Rarely (1% or less) the cervix is weakened by the LLETZ. This can cause premature birth (when the baby is born too early)
- Rarely (1% or less) scarring can occur which narrows the opening of the cervix. This can make your periods more painful. It can also stop the cervix dilating (opening up) normally in labour.

What to expect with an outpatient LLETZ

The procedure is very similar to the colposcopy which you will have already had. The gynaecologist will look closely again at the cervix with the colposcope before the LLETZ is done.



The cervix will be cleaned and local anaesthetic will be given (injected) into the cervix.

- You may feel some mild discomfort for a few seconds from this.
- Some patients also feel slightly light headed, dizzy or shaky for a few minutes after the anaesthetic is given. This wears off quickly.
- The gynaecologist will make sure that you are feeling comfortable and the cervix is numb before doing the LLETZ procedure.

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A very fine hot wire loop is passed through the abnormal area and a thin slice is removed.

- Because the loop is so fine and hot it seals (closes off) the blood vessels during the procedure preventing most bleeding.
- Sometimes further minor treatment is needed to stop small points of bleeding.
- You should not feel pain from these treatments or the LLETZ procedure itself.
- After an outpatient LLETZ, you will be allowed to go home as long as you are feeling well. However, we recommend that you do not drive yourself home so please arrange for someone to come with you and take you home.

What to expect with an inpatient LLETZ

If you are having a LLETZ procedure in the operating theatre under a general anaesthetic you will be:

- admitted to the Day Only ward an hour or two (occasionally longer) before the procedure.
- asked to fast (not eat or drink) for a period of time before the procedure (our staff will tell you how long).

After your LLETZ you will be

- taken to the recovery ward where the nurses will monitor you and check your pulse and blood pressure and give you pain relief if you need it
- usually able to go home after 4-6 hours
 - as long as you can walk around without feeling dizzy and you have had something to eat and drink
 - NOTE: please arrange for someone to drive you home as you are not allowed to drive for 24 hours after an anaesthetic. (Some insurance companies request even longer – check your policy).

Timing of LLETZ

- If you are having your LLETZ done as an outpatient in clinic, it is best not to be on the heavy days of your period
 - Please contact the clinic to reschedule your appointment if you unexpectedly have heavy bleeding
 - Light bleeding is not a problem
- If you are having your LLETZ done in the operating theatre, it does not matter if you have your period

Testing the tissue removed at LLETZ

The tissue samples that are removed from your cervix are sent to the pathologist to be looked at under the microscope.

- Generally they will show the same changes as at your colposcopy
- If there are any unexpected changes, your gynaecologist will discuss them with you when you come for follow up or earlier if necessary

What should I expect after the LLETZ?

Generally you will feel fine after the procedure and be able to go back to work the next day though a few women may want another day to recover.

Some women may experience mild, crampy lower abdominal (tummy) pain, similar to period pain, for 24 hours after the procedure. Paracetamol or ibuprofen should settle this discomfort.

It is normal to have a small amount of vaginal bleeding or discharge for 7-10 days after the procedure.

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We advise that:

- you not use tampons for 6 weeks after the operation (use sanitary pads)
- you not use vaginal douches
- avoid swimming or bathing for 2 weeks (showering is fine)
- do not have sex for 6 weeks after the LLETZ

Are there any symptoms I should look out for?

LLETZ is a very minor procedure and it is extremely rare to have problems after it.

However, you should see your GP or gynaecologist, or else contact the hospital clinic or emergency department if you have any of the following symptoms:

- burning and stinging when you pass urine
- needing to pass small amounts of urine often
- heavy or bad smelling vaginal discharge or bleeding
- increasing abdominal pain
- a temperature (fever)
- pain, swelling, redness of your legs or any difficulty standing or walking
- shortness of breath or chest pain – if you experience these problems you should call an ambulance.



The usual follow up appointment after a LLETZ procedure is at 6 months – it takes about this long for the cervix to be well healed and back to normal.

Your gynaecologist or the clinic team will let you know if you need an appointment sooner.

We welcome further feedback on this brochure as a way of continually improving our service.

Send your feedback to:

WSLHD-Get_Involved@health.nsw.gov.au