Outpatient hysteroscopy

Gynaecology

Information for patients
What is a hysteroscopy and why do I need one?
A hysteroscopy is when a thin telescope (a thin tube with a camera on the end) is used to look at the inside of your womb. You might need a hysteroscopy if you have:

- Heavy or irregular periods.
- Unexpected bleeding from the vagina in older age.
- Fibroids or polyps (non cancerous, extra pieces of muscle or skin inside the womb) that need treatment
- Problems with fertility or miscarriage (which is when you lose an unborn baby)

Where will I have the hysteroscopy?
In the colposcopy suite, clinic A, Lanesborough Wing, St Georges Hospital

What will happen to me?
You will come up to the clinic and be checked in by the nurse who will confirm all of your personal details are correct. You don’t need to do anything special beforehand, and can eat and drink as normal. You will meet the doctor or specialist nurse doing your test and they will ask you questions about your health, both now and in the past. They will then explain the procedure in detail and gain your consent. It is important that you understand the procedure, so please ask if there is something you are not clear about.

You will be asked to lie on a couch and your legs will be supported on rests so that your knees are raised and slightly apart. In most women, there is no need to use a speculum. This is the instrument that opens up the vagina when you have a smear test. Usually the
only thing that goes into the vagina, is the thin telescope. Because this is narrow, it doesn’t stretch the vagina, so will not be painful or uncomfortable. The telescope has warm, sterile saline (slightly salty water) coming out of the end of it, and this opens up the vagina slightly. This in turn, allows us to see the inside of the vagina and the opening to the womb (the cervix). At that stage, the only sensation you will feel is wet, it will not be painful. It should then be possible to pass the telescope through the opening of the cervix, inside the womb.

When the telescope passes inside the womb, fluid from the telescope will also pass inside. Most women at this stage will still only have a sensation of being wet. In some women though, the fluid will cause the womb to cramp a little, and this gives a mild period like sensation. Any cramping that occurs should only last for the time of the test and will disappear within a few minutes of finishing. Usually the test takes just a few minutes to do.
If you need a biopsy or removal of polyps, this can usually be done at the same time. If this were necessary it does not usually cause any extra discomfort, but it may take a few more minutes to do. If any samples are taken, they will be sent to the laboratory for examination using a microscope.

**So, will it be painful?**

More than half of the women we see do not feel discomfort at all. Most of the rest feel some mild, period like cramping which lasts as long as the test and disappears soon after. For that reason, you will not normally need any anaesthetic. A small number of women (about 2 in a hundred in our experience), will experience more severe cramping. In those women we do not continue to try to do the test in clinic, instead, we stop and suggest they come back on another day to have the test under general anaesthetic (which is when you are asleep). Rarely, cramping from the test lasts for up to an hour. If that happens, we do have painkillers in the clinic that you can take.

Some women do ask us if they should take painkillers before they come. In most, this will not be necessary, however, it will not be harmful if you do, as long as you take something you know is safe for you. In most cases this will be Ibuprofen (Nurofen) or paracetamol.

**What happens after the test?**

Immediately after the test, you will talk with the doctor or nurse about what was found. If you need any further treatment, they will discuss this with you at the same time. Most women will be able to leave the clinic straightaway and do normal daily activities. Some might stay up to 30 minutes more to allow any cramping to settle. You may experience spotting of blood for a few days afterwards. Whilst you have any bleeding, we advise you not to have sex, use
tampons or go swimming as this may increase your risk of infection. When any bleeding has stopped, you can safely resume. If any biopsies have been taken, we will write to you and your GP with the results within 2-3 weeks. If you need any further treatment, we will arrange another appointment which you will receive at the same time.

**Are there any complications?**
It would be very uncommon to have any problems following this test. Infection is possible, though rare, and you should watch out for signs of this over the first 5 days following the test. The signs would be pain in the lower part of your tummy, an offensive smelling discharge from the vagina or, a high temperature. If you were to have any of these signs, you should contact us or your GP as you might need a short course of antibiotics.

**IMPORTANT**
We would not want to do a test in anyone who could be pregnant. If you are using contraception (such as condoms, coils, pills, injections, implants) or have been sterilised, we can do this test at any time.

If you are having periods or are less than 1 year from your last period, it is possible that you could become pregnant. If you are not using any contraception, we would ask you to avoid having sex for 3 weeks before the test date.

If your period is due on the date of the test please call the hysteroscopy secretary to reschedule.

If you are not having regular periods and are bleeding on the day of the test, please attend your appointment and we can give advice.
**Useful Contacts**

**Outpatient hysteroscopy secretary**
Direct telephone 0208 725 2088

**Hysteroscopy clinic sister**
Bleep 6423

**Outpatient matron**
Bleep 8782

To bleep someone, telephone the hospital switchboard on 0208 672 1255 and state the bleep number required.