

Having an outpatient hysteroscopy

Introduction

The doctor has advised you to have a hysteroscopy to help find the cause of your problems. This leaflet will answer some of the common questions asked about this procedure before you arrive for your appointment. We will be happy to answer any questions you may have when you visit the clinic.

Feel free to discuss any questions or concerns with your nurse or telephone us on: 0118 322 7181.

What is a hysteroscopy?

Hysteroscopy is the name given to the procedure that allows a doctor to look inside the uterus (womb) using a thin telescope called a hysteroscope. The hysteroscope is gently passed into the vagina and through the cervix (neck of the womb); no external cutting is involved. The hysteroscope is connected to a TV screen so that the inside of the womb can be seen by the doctor and also the patient (if the patient wishes).

Why have I been referred to the outpatient hysteroscopy clinic?

Women are referred to the hysteroscopy clinic to find the cause of their abnormal vaginal bleeding and to decide on treatment. Abnormal vaginal bleeding may take many forms such as:

- Heavy or irregular periods.
- Bleeding in between periods.
- Bleeding after the menopause.

Why outpatient hysteroscopy? What are the benefits?

Hysteroscopy is traditionally carried out when the patient is under general anaesthetic (you are asleep); however, modern thin hysteroscopes now allow this procedure to be performed while you are awake. Being awake for the test carries many patient advantages over general anaesthetic:

- Because patients are conscious (awake) throughout the outpatient hysteroscopy test they do not feel drowsy or need a long recovery period when it has finished (unlike general anaesthetic hysteroscopy).

- Patients can drive, go to work, or go home independently, straight after the test. This is not possible after a general anaesthetic.
- The outpatient hysteroscopy appointment lasts for approximately 40 minutes; general anaesthetic hysteroscopy will take the whole day.
- Patients generally need fewer visits to hospital if they have outpatient hysteroscopy.
- There is no need to fast (no food or fluids) before the outpatient test.
- Patients are told what is going on and what can be seen during the outpatient test. Patients can watch the TV screen with the doctor if they wish.
- The outpatient test avoids the risks of general anaesthetic.
- There is less risk of complications during outpatient hysteroscopy.

Before arriving for your appointment

We would advise you to take simple pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen 1-2 hours before your appointment. This is to help reduce any crampy 'period' type pain that you may experience during the procedure.

What does outpatient hysteroscopy involve?

When you attend the hysteroscopy clinic the doctor or specialist nurse will ask you questions about your problems. Following the discussion, you will be asked to remove your lower clothes and wear a hospital gown. A nurse will be with you for the whole of the procedure. She will answer your questions and make you feel comfortable.

Just as happens during a smear test, an instrument is used to examine the vagina and cervix. The cervix is cleaned with cleaning fluid and the thin hysteroscope (a telescope thinner than a pencil) is gently passed through it to look at the endometrium (inner lining of the womb). A small amount of clean water passes through the telescope into the womb so that all of the lining can be seen clearly. The hysteroscope pictures can be seen by the doctor / specialist nurse on a TV screen that you can also see if you wish.

The doctor will sometimes take a tiny sample of tissue (a biopsy), or remove any small polyps from the womb lining, which will be sent for laboratory analysis. The result of this will be sent to your GP. You can get the result from your GP practice approximately 3 weeks after your hysteroscopy appointment.

How long will the outpatient hysteroscopy take?

Most hysteroscopy procedures take less than 5 minutes. The whole appointment takes about 40 minutes.

Is outpatient hysteroscopy painful?

This procedure is not generally painful. Some women experience a little discomfort and occasionally 'period-like' pains during the test. The doctor can apply local anaesthetic to the cervix but this is not usually necessary.

The doctor can stop at any time if the test becomes too uncomfortable.

What are the risks or potential complications of outpatient hysteroscopy?

Outpatient hysteroscopy is a safe procedure but just as with any medical procedure, complications can occur. Fortunately, these are very rare and most occur much less often than if the hysteroscopy is performed under a general anaesthetic.

The potential complications are as follows:

- Infection of the womb or abdomen (tummy) is uncommon and occurs in approximately 1 in 500 outpatient hysteroscopy procedures.
- Inability of the doctor to pass the hysteroscope into the womb. This occurs in about 4 in 100 outpatient hysteroscopy procedures.
- Fainting (Vasovagal) episode occurs in about 1 in every 100 outpatient hysteroscopy procedures.
- Making a hole in the womb is an extremely rare event. It is even rarer to injure other structures within the abdomen (tummy). These include the bladder, bowel or blood vessels. In the rare event of injury to these internal structures, an open abdominal operation would be needed on the same day.
- Heavy bleeding is also a very rare event during this test. Complications such as this, or injury to internal organs occur less than 2 in 1000 outpatient hysteroscopy procedures.

How should I prepare for my outpatient hysteroscopy appointment?

- Eating and drinking: You should eat and drink as normal before your appointment.
- Clothing: As we provide you with a gown, we advise you to come to the clinic in clothes that you find easy to change out of for the test.
- Period: The test is not usually performed when you are having your period but can be done if you have prolonged or continuous bleeding. If the appointment date is on the same day as your expected period date, please call the hospital number on the appointment letter to change your appointment date as soon as possible.
- Sanitary pads: Because some women have a small amount of bleeding after the hysteroscopy we advise you to come with a sanitary pad to use after the test.
- Can I come alone? Although it is reasonable to come to the clinic alone, you may prefer to come with a partner, friend or relative.

- **Pregnancy:** If you are, or think you may be pregnant, you should not have the hysteroscopy. Please contact the outpatient hysteroscopy clinic (telephone number on back of this leaflet) before your appointment for further advice.

What should I expect following outpatient hysteroscopy appointment?

- **Recovery:** You can continue doing most normal activities directly after the hysteroscopy.
- **Driving / work:** You may drive and even return to work on the same day as the test.
- **Painkillers:** Some women experience period-like pains for a short length of time after the procedure. These are eased with normal painkillers (e.g. Ibuprofen or Paracetamol).
- **Bleeding:** Some women experience a small amount of vaginal bleeding or discharge following the procedure. This may last up to two weeks. If this becomes heavy or offensive smelling, please contact your GP for further advice. We advise you to use a sanitary pad rather than a tampon for a week after your test.
- **Sex:** We advise you to avoid sexual intercourse for about a week after the hysteroscopy.

Other sources of information:

- NHS Choices www.nhs.uk
- Visit the Trust website at www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Contact us

Appointments Office Tel: 0118 322 7295

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Royal Berkshire Hospital NHS Foundation Trust
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For more information about the Trust, visit our website at www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

This document can be made available in other languages and formats upon request.

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