

How to make smear tests more comfortable

This patient information leaflet covers tips for patients on making cervical screening (smear tests) an easier experience.

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Keeping up to date with cervical screening (smear tests) is important. The screening programme really works effectively for women. However, there are still around 3200 new cases of cervical cancer per year in the UK and this number is set to grow by 143% over the next 25 years.¹

- Use of vaginal oestrogen prior to a smear can make the world of difference to comfort levels if you know that you have had discomfort with smears in the past.
- Vaginal dryness, soreness, prickling or itching in the perimenopause and menopause can be linked to low oestrogen levels. Consider asking your primary care practitioner for some vaginal oestrogen treatment before your cervical screening appointment.
- Please ensure you've been on vaginal oestrogen for long enough; three months is ideal.
- Vaginal oestrogen is considered suitable and works just where it is needed, there is known to be very little absorption into the body's system.
- There is a new non-hormonal treatment for vaginal discomfort for those of you who need to avoid hormones. Ask your primary care practitioner for more information about this.

Symptoms of cervical cancer include vaginal bleeding after sex, bleeding in between periods or bleeding after menopause. Even if your smear is up to date, please seek medical advice about any of these symptoms. There are other causes for these types of bleeding. ♀

REFERENCES 1 <https://tinyurl.com/wfg58cu> | 2 <https://tinyurl.com/wfg58cu>

CERVICAL SCREENING UPTAKE IS ON THE DECLINE

According to the *Better for women report*²: 'As a result of these many barriers, uptake of the screening programme reached a 20-year low of 71.4% in 2017/1823 and there are huge variations in the number of women attending cervical screening appointments across regions of England.'

TOP TIPS

- 1 The key to being as comfortable as possible during a smear is knowing that 'you are in charge' during your cervical screening appointment.
- 2 Remember – it's your body. Healthcare practitioners can and will do nothing without your consent.
- 3 Do whatever you need to do help you feel more relaxed, bring someone you trust with you, plug your headphones in, make sure you give yourself time to recover afterwards if you need to.