

Cryotherapy for Abnormal Cervical Cell Changes

*Low grade dysplasia on PAP smear and Colposcopy

Surgery Overview

Cryotherapy destroys abnormal tissue on the cervix by freezing it. Cryotherapy destroys some normal tissue along with the abnormal tissue.

During Cryotherapy, liquid nitrogen circulates through a probe placed next to the abnormal tissue. This freezes the tissue for 2 to 3 minutes. It may be allowed to thaw and then refrozen for another 3 minutes.

Cryotherapy causes little or no discomfort. Most women feel a sensation of cold and a little cramping, and sometimes a sense of warmth spreads to the upper body and face. Repeat treatments may be necessary to remove all abnormal tissue.

Cryotherapy is not adequate treatment if abnormal cells are high in the cervical canal; in this case, another treatment, such as a cone biopsy, will be recommended instead of cryotherapy.

How it is done

Cryotherapy is usually done at your health professional's office, a clinic, or a hospital as an outpatient procedure (you do not have to spend a night in the hospital).

You will need to take off your clothes below the waist and drape a paper or cloth covering around your waist. You will then lie on your back on an examination table with your feet raised and in the stirrups. Your health professional will insert a speculum into your vagina, which gently spreads apart the vaginal walls, allowing the inside of the vagina and the cervix to be examined. Medication to numb the cervix (cervical block) often is not needed because cryotherapy usually does not cause much pain, just mild cramping and sometimes a sensation of warmth in the rest of the body.

What to Expect After Surgery

Most women are able to return to their normal activity level the day after the cryotherapy procedure.

After Cryotherapy

A watery vaginal discharge will occur for about 2 to 3 weeks. Do not use tampons, douche, or have sexual intercourse during these 2 to 3 weeks.

When to Call Your health professional

Call your health professional if you have any of the following symptoms:

1. A fever
2. Moderate to heavy bleeding (more than you would usually have during a menstrual period).
3. Increasing pelvic pain.
4. Bad-smelling or yellowish vaginal discharge, which may indicate an infection.

Why it is done

Cryotherapy is done when abnormal Pap test results have been confirmed by colposcopy. If the results of a cervical biopsy show normal tissue, then cryotherapy can be used to treat the abnormal tissue seen with colposcopy. If the results of a cervical biopsy show abnormal tissue high inside the cervical canal, then cryotherapy will not be done, and another treatment will be recommended.

How Well It Works

Cryotherapy is an effective method for destroying abnormal cervical tissue, depending on the size, depth, and type of abnormal tissue. Cryotherapy destroys all of the abnormal tissue in more than 85% of cases.

Risks

Cryotherapy has fewer complications than any other form of treatment for abnormal cervical cell changes. Destruction of the abnormal tissue will not be complete if the abnormal cells are too deep in the cervical tissue.

What to Think About

If you have cryotherapy, you need regular follow-up Pap tests. Pap tests should be repeated every 4 to 6 months or as recommended by your health professional. Once several Pap test results are normal, you and your health professional can decide how often Pap test screening will occur.

Cryotherapy is not a treatment for cervical cancer.