

CRYOTHERAPY OF THE CERVIX

What is Cryotherapy and why is it done?

Cryotherapy is a procedure that uses freezing gas to destroy abnormal cells on the cervix. The cervix is the lowest part of the uterus (or womb) and opens into the vagina. When unhealthy cells are destroyed, the body can then replace them with new, healthy cells. The procedure is performed in the doctor's office while you are awake and takes about 10 minutes.

Cryotherapy may be done to treat cervicitis (inflammation of the cervix) or to treat cervical dysplasia (abnormal cells on the cervix).

How is Cryotherapy performed?

When you arrive for your appointment, you will be instructed to undress from the waist down. You will then lie on the examination table, just as if you were getting a regular Pap smear. A speculum will be inserted into your vagina to spread the vaginal walls. The doctor will then insert an instrument called a cryoprobe into your vagina and press it against the cervix. Nitrogen gas chills the metal cryoprobe and creates an "ice ball" on the cervix. The ice ball kills the abnormal cells. You may experience some chills or cramping during this part of the procedure.

For best results, the freezing is done for three minutes, the cervix is allowed to thaw for five minutes, and then freezing is repeated for another three minutes.

What are the risks of Cryotherapy?

- Mild cramping during the procedure is the most common symptom.
- Dizziness upon standing up after the procedure. Let your doctor or nurse know if this happens to you. Lie down flat on the examination table so that you do not faint. A few minutes of rest should relieve this symptom.
- Bleeding and infection because foreign objects are being inserted into the vagina
- Scarring on the cervix (cervical stenosis) may occur but is usually minor. More severe scarring may make it more difficult to get pregnant, or cause increased cramping with menstrual periods.

What happens after the procedure?

You can resume almost all of your normal activities immediately after the procedure. For 2-3 weeks after the procedure, you will have a lot of watery discharge caused by the shedding of the old, dead cells. You may need to avoid sexual intercourse and using tampons for several weeks after the procedure to give the cervix time to heal. Avoid douching as this can cause severe infections in the uterus and tubes.

Your doctor will have you return for a Pap smear in three to six months after the procedure to make sure the abnormal cells have been destroyed and have not recurred. If the abnormal cells are still present, your doctor may recommend another procedure.

When should I contact my health care provider?

- If you experience a temperature over 100.6 degrees F.
- If you notice heavy bleeding or vaginal bleeding that lasts longer than 1 hour.
- If you notice a thick, foul-smelling discharge.