A Self-Advocate’s Guide To Pelvic Exams

Created by the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council.
A pelvic exam checks the vagina, uterus, ovaries, and cervix for signs of sickness and health.

The exam should only take place in a health clinic or doctor’s office.

Where do I go for a pelvic exam?

The exam should only take place in a health clinic or doctor’s office.
Who should get a pelvic exam?

People between the ages of 18 - 65.

Why should I get a pelvic exam?

Your body is important!

- Even if you are not having sex with another person, your pelvis area needs to be checked to stay healthy.
- People with disabilities have a higher risk of cancer because they do not get regular check ups.

When should I get a pelvic exam?

Your healthcare provider will tell you if you need to have a pelvic exam. Some people have a pelvic exam once every 3 years. Other people need an exam every year. You healthcare provider may also recommend a pelvic exam for the following reasons:

- Family history of cancer.
- Pelvic pain.
- Unusual vaginal discharge or bleeding.
- Concerns about sexually transmitted diseases or infections (STIs).
- You are pregnant.
What should I expect during a pelvic exam?

A doctor, nurse or physician’s assistant will check your vagina. They will use a medical tool called a speculum to make it easier to see inside your vagina.

- You may feel pressure or discomfort.
- You may bring a support person with you during the exam.
- You may ask to take some medicine that will help you relax during the exam. You can also ask to be put to sleep.
- This exam should not take longer than 10 minutes.
- It is okay to ask questions to understand the process.
- It is okay to use your voice if you're uncomfortable.

For more information:
Contact your primary care provider or nearest Planned Parenthood with questions. Contact You First at 800-508-2222 to learn more about eligibility for free screening.
What is The Inclusive Healthcare Partnership Project?

The creators of the Inclusive Healthcare Partnership Project (IHPP) believe that everyone should have the tools they need to support their own health. This includes health information that is easy to understand. It also means that healthcare providers are prepared to work with patients with a wide range of disabilities.

IHPP has two goals. First, to create plain language health information designed by and for people with developmental disabilities. Second, to help nurses, doctors, and other providers communicate effectively with neurodiverse patients.

Want to learn more about this health topic? Want to view our sources?
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