

Vaginal examination

What you need to know

This leaflet is designed to help prepare you for the vaginal examinations we often have to do when we look after your gynaecological health.

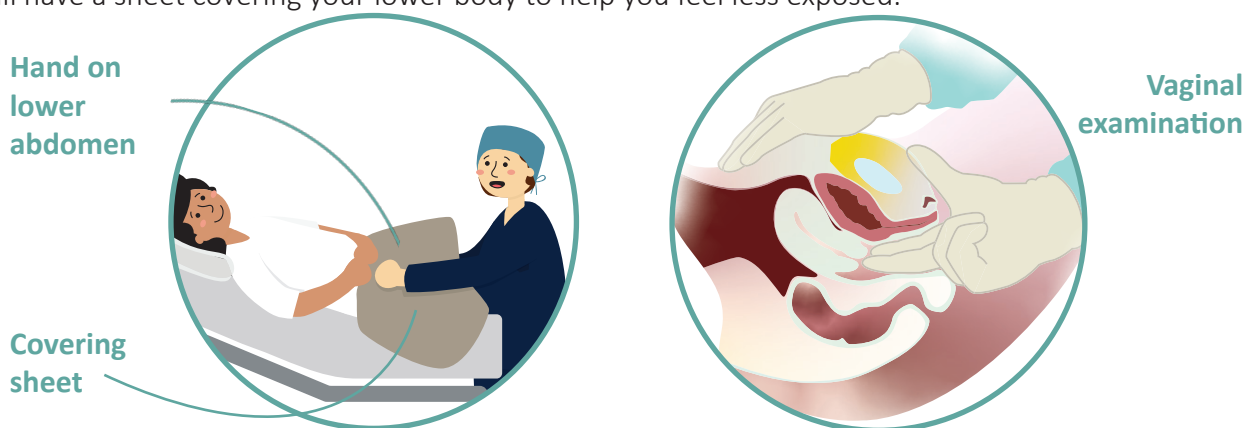
We understand it can make people feel very exposed and that there are many cultures where this area of the body is particularly sacred or tapu.

We also know that a lot of people have experienced sexual trauma in their past, and having a vaginal examination can be confronting or distressing.

What is a vaginal examination?

A vaginal examination is when your healthcare provider uses one hand's fingers to feel inside your vagina; while pressing with the other hand on your lower abdomen.

You will have a sheet covering your lower body to help you feel less exposed.



Why and when are vaginal examinations done?

Clinic

- We may do this in the clinic to help us give you a diagnosis; or to rule out a diagnosis. If you need surgery, this kind of examination can also help us decide what surgical options you have.
- If required, it will happen after your healthcare provider has talked to you about your gynae problem and medical history.
- We may also perform a speculum examination, using an instrument designed to fit in your vagina and help us see your cervix. This also allows us to do a “pap smear” or take samples to test for infections.
- A “pipelle” biopsy may be done for some people. This is a way to sample the lining of the womb and can help many people avoid a surgical procedure. If you need this, your doctor will talk you through it on the day
- Missing these parts of your clinic assessment can sometimes make it more challenging to make certain decisions.
- We will not do this if it causes you great distress; or have never been sexually active and do not want us to.

Operating theatre with anaesthetic

- If you do end up having surgery, we usually repeat the examination once you're asleep to get the final pieces of information we need before starting the operation.
- We also often place specially designed instruments through your vagina and into your uterus to help us with certain kinds of surgery.
- When you wake up from the operation, it can feel like someone has been “down there” even though most of the work is done through your upper body.

Who will do my vaginal examination?

- Vaginal examinations are usually done by doctors or nurse practitioners, and it is a skill that needs time and training to develop.
- As this is a sensitive procedure, our doctors will often have a nurse in the room to chaperone or comfort you- particularly if they are male.
- Waitemata DHB hospitals are teaching hospitals so part of our work is to make sure our future doctors learn this skill well, with very close supervision.



- If a medical student is rostered to your clinic appointment or operating theatre, you will be asked ahead of time if you give permission for them to examine you.
- In a surgical setting, you will be under anaesthetic when the examination happens.
- Our medical students can only examine you if your doctor has asked you for permission beforehand, AND you have signed a consent form.
- You have the right to say no, and this will NOT affect the quality of care we give you or how we think of you.
- We are very grateful to the women who agree to help with our teaching- there is no other way to teach this properly.

Suggestions

If reading about this makes you feel anxious, or you find the idea of a vaginal examination particularly uncomfortable, please let your doctor know at any stage of your appointment.

You can bring a support person such as a friend, or member of your family or whanau with you to the clinic. If this is not possible, you can ask that one of our nurses comes in to support you.

Many people feel shy and embarrassed about vaginal examinations, but you are not alone. Try telling us how you feel about it, and we will do our best to reassure you.

Questions for your health care provider (doctor or nurse practitioner)