

IMPORTANT THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT YOUR URGENT REFERRAL

Why Have I been referred?

You have been referred urgently due to symptoms of abnormal postmenopausal vaginal bleeding or abnormal bleeding on the run up to the menopause. Whilst 8 out of 10 women will not have cancer, it is important for us to exclude any cancers of the female reproductive organs (uterus, cervix, ovaries, vagina, and vulva).

What should I expect?

You are likely to be offered a pelvic ultrasound scan to look at your pelvic organs in better detail and measure the thickness of the endometrium (lining of the uterus). This may be done at the same appointment or at a separate visit.

The pelvic ultrasound scan is safe and does not involve radiation. It is best done as an internal vaginal scan which involves a scan probe (which is a bit thicker than a thumb) being inserted into the vagina. This allows us to scan closer to your uterus and ovaries and takes around 10-15 minutes to complete. Although the scan can be a bit uncomfortable it is not usually painful.

Please do not pass urine before your scan as a full bladder can be helpful to the scan. If the sonographer needs you to empty your bladder they will let you know.

After the ultrasound scan, you will be seen by a doctor or specialist nurse who will examine you with a speculum (much like a smear test) to make sure your vulva (lips around the vaginal opening), vagina and cervix (neck of the womb) look healthy. If there is any concern, biopsies can usually be taken in clinic. Mostly this is a quick procedure that takes a minute or so to perform once the equipment is set up.

If the endometrium is thin (less than 4 millimetres), then endometrial biopsy is usually not needed.

If the endometrium is thickened or abnormal on the scan, an endometrial biopsy can be taken in clinic and involves passing a small straw like instrument through the



cervix into the uterus to sample endometrial cells. It usually takes less than a minute to take the biopsy. Sometimes more than one biopsy is needed.

Around 1 in 4 women who warrant a biopsy also need to have an outpatient hysteroscopy. If a hysteroscopy is needed, this can take around 10-15 minutes to complete.

Will this be painful?

Endometrial biopsies and outpatient hysteroscopy can cause severe pelvic cramps in some women, whilst in others the pain is minimal. Please let the staff know if you experience severe pain. If needed, we can always arrange the hysteroscopy to be performed as a day case operation under general anaesthetic on a different day.

It is a good idea for you take your usual pain killers, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen, one hour before your appointment.

In the clinic other pain killers such as a local anaesthetic injection or Entonox gas may be available. Most women cope really well with a combination of these pain management methods as the biopsies and hysteroscopy are generally relatively quick procedures.

Cervical and vaginal biopsies are not usually painful and are very quick to do. Therefore, most women will not need a local anaesthetic injection for these.

Vulval biopsies will usually need a local anaesthetic injection for pain relief before the biopsy is taken.

Things to Remember

- Remember to eat before you come to clinic as some people feel unwell, or shaky due to anxiety, pain and the Entonox if they have not eaten.
- Remember to take your own simple painkillers around 1 hour before you attend clinic.
- Let us know before your appointment if you have any special requirements such as you do not want to be seen by male staff. Please note, this may



cause some delay to your appointment whilst we try and accommodate your needs.

- If you have a vaginal pessary for prolapse, this may need to be removed before your scan. Please let the staff know when you attend the clinic and allow extra time before your appointment for this.
- Arrive at least 15 minutes before your appointment in case you need to go to the scan department or have a pessary removed.
- Your wellbeing is at the forefront of our minds, and we will ensure holistic measures are in place where possible to make your appointment as comfortable as possible.

