

## Smoking and Your Pap Test

### **What does smoking have to do with an abnormal Pap test?**

Women who smoke are more likely to have abnormal Pap tests than women who do not smoke. Women who smoke are also more likely to develop cervical cancer than women who do not smoke.

The Pap test detects cell changes on the cervix or opening to the uterus (womb). Most abnormal cell changes are caused by infections with HPV (human papillomavirus). HPV infection is very common, especially in young women. Fortunately, most of the time the immune system gets rid of HPV before it can cause abnormal cell changes.

In women who smoke, however, HPV infections are more likely to cause cell changes than in women who do not smoke. Some of those changes are precancerous and can eventually become cancer. So smoking is known as a “risk factor” for both precancerous changes and for cancer of the cervix

### **If I have an abnormal Pap, will it change back to normal if I stop smoking?**

All women who have abnormal Paps need follow-up. Smoking lowers the ability of the immune system to get rid of HPV. Stopping smoking markedly improves the immune system, making it more likely that the Pap will return to normal without treatment. But even if you stop smoking, you still need to follow your health care provider’s recommendations about additional Paps or other tests.

### **What if I only smoke a few cigarettes per day?**

There is no known number of cigarettes that it is “safe” to smoke. The sooner you quit completely, the quicker your lungs, cervix, and other organs can begin healing.

### **Where can I get help in stopping smoking?**

Ask your health care provider if there are special services in your area for smokers who want to quit. You can also contact the American Lung Association in your area. Here are some websites with helpful materials:

<http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/conspack.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/quit/canquit.htm>

<http://www.quitnet.com/>