

CERVICAL SCREENING IN THE PERI-MENOPAUSE AND POST MENOPAUSE

During the menopause many women experience vaginal dryness or soreness, lichen sclerosis, vaginal tightness, vulval or vaginal or you may have had a bad experience during a previous test. Your mood can change, which may make you feel more anxious or low. Hot flushes may cause you to worry more. Please try to be reassured that as clinicians we try to make your experience as ok as possible.

I'm worried the procedure will be uncomfortable, what options do I have for making it more comfortable?

- There are a variety of sizes of speculum available for cervical screening. The clinician performing the cervical screening may be able to start with a smaller speculum. You can ask to insert the speculum yourself, going at your own pace and finding a comfortable position for you.

- You may feel more comfortable in a different position- lying on your left side with your legs bent up. Try wearing a skirt or dress to your appointment- this may help you feel more covered.

- You can ask the nurse to use a water based lubricant on the speculum, to make insertion into the vagina easier.

- Hormonal changes (e.g. peri-menopause leading to post-menopause) can sometimes make a cervical screening more uncomfortable. For patients experiencing this, they may be prescribed pessaries or cream 2 weeks ahead of a cervical screening to help lubricate the vagina. You will need to stop using the oestrogen 2 days prior to your test. Please ring to discuss with your nurse or doctor if you think this may be something that would help you.

- If the procedure feels painful, ask to stop immediately. For patients who have had difficult past experiences, please be aware that clinicians are all fully trained to talk with you, put you at ease and make this experience as tolerable as possible. There are always options if the procedure is too much – please do talk to your clinician.

- Anyone who may have experienced trauma, female genital mutilation or abuse can also be referred to a local NHS Trusts who offer specialist genital/vulval pain clinics- there is not any reason why you cannot be referred if you feel this is a better option.

- Women who have a disability may not be able to access the clinic or get onto the examination couch- home testing is available in some areas or again referral to a specialist clinic.

- You can always take a friend or family member with you for added support.

Please do not be frightened to ask for support with your screening!