

LEEP (Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure)

by Cameron Greene, MD

If your pap smear results are abnormal, your provider may suggest an in-office procedure performed under local anesthesia called a LEEP (Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure.) This can provide diagnosis and/or treatment of cervical cellular problems.

In a LEEP, a very thin wire is used to remove a portion of the cervix by way of electrocautery. With your legs positioned in the stirrups, a special speculum is placed in the vagina to optimize visualization. Local anesthesia is injected into the cervix possibly causing a slight stinging sensation. Once the site is numb, the loop is passed into the cervix and the abnormal cells are removed. The cervical base is then cauterized and may also have a hemostatic solution applied. The removed tissue is submitted to a pathologist for definitive analysis.

Most patients do extremely well and are able to resume normal activities once they leave the office. You'll be advised to avoid intercourse, tampons and douching until your follow-up visit.

Immediately and for the first several days, it's not uncommon to have a watery, pinkish discharge and some mild cramping. In addition, if a hemostatic solution was applied, you may note a blackish-brown discharge. In about 10-15% of patients, heavy bleeding may be noted 7-10 days after the procedure. It's important to contact your provider's office if this occurs so the area may be cauterized again, usually with just the hemostatic solution.

The LEEP has been associated with an increased risk of premature delivery and, occasionally, cervical narrowing which can cause problems with getting pregnant. These are very rare complications, but it is important to discuss with your provider these and any other concerns prior to proceeding.

In summary, LEEP is a simple procedure easily performed in an office setting that effectively diagnoses and treats cervical cellular abnormalities.

Cameron Greene, MD