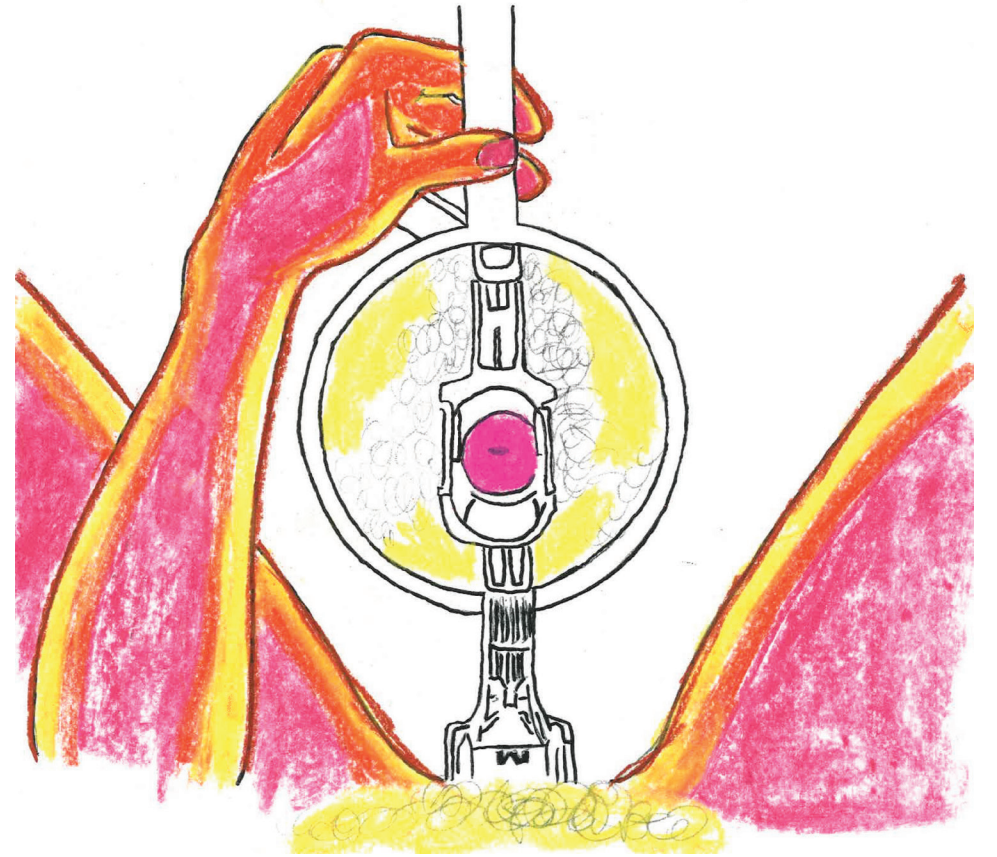
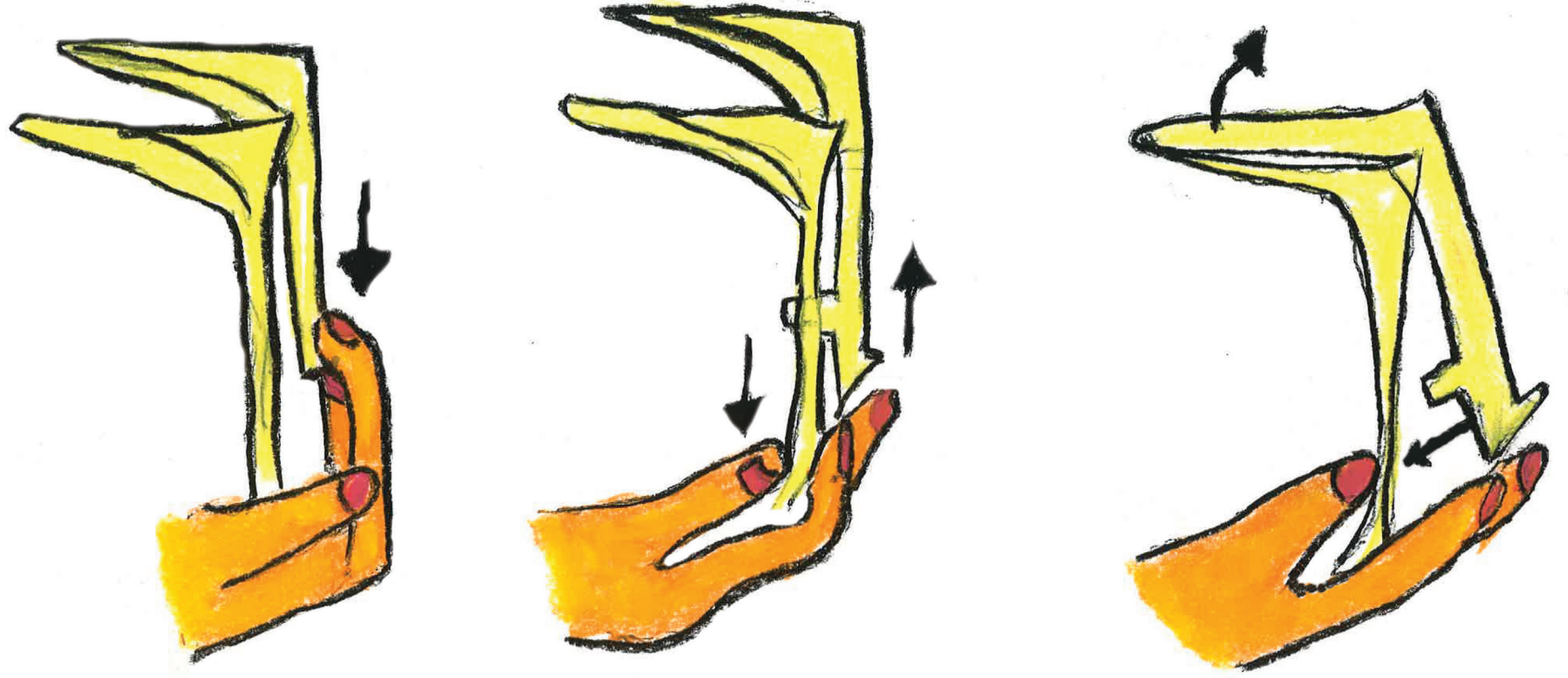


How to  
Own  
Your  
Cervix





## Why Cervical Self Exam

When I was small I used to get throat infections all the time. I would open my mouth, stick my tongue out, and shine a flashlight down my throat. I could see my tonsils. I learned what was healthy and not healthy. I learned how much and what kind of mucus on my tonsils meant I needed anti-biotic. I knew when to drink water, or gargle with salt water and when I needed to go to the doctor. I would help my mom as well. Looking in her throat. Her tonsils were different then mine, they looked deflated where as mine looked like full party balloons. I asked my doctor about that and he taught me that when your young your tonsils are puffy and usually around the age of 10 they start to deflate.

It took a long time for me to see my cervix, 28 years. The first time I was doing it for school, that was my justification. I felt like I needed a justification, looking for looking sake was not enough. I had read about doing a cervical self-exam to be able to see or visualize (as they say in the medical world) your cervix. I didn't have a speculum, I could order one on the internet but they cost ten dollars. I would spend that on lunch but a view of my cervix-it didn't seem worth it.

To understand something. I always want to see something, better if I can feel something, better if I can make something. I want to understand my body. Not to have mastery or control over it, but to live it and enjoy it. ~Vanessa Dion Fletcher

## Three Easy Steps

In addition to the hand-held mirror, flashlight, and speculum, you may want lubricating jelly or water on the speculum for easier insertion. (Use a water-based lubricant, not Vaseline.) Before you start, practice opening and closing the speculum; and make sure you understand how to lock it open, as well as how to unlock and close the bills. Then sit comfortably; leaning back with your legs open, knees up, on a bed or couch with pillows behind you.

- 1 Put some lubricant or water onto the bills (the rounded part ) which you will insert into your vagina) . Take a deep breath. As you exhale, let your muscles relax. To insert the speculum, hold it in one hand, handles up, bills together. Using your other hand, spread the labia and insert the bills of the speculum as you would a tampon.

- 2 When you have inserted it as far as it will comfortably go, open the bills using the mechanism on the handles that you practiced with earlier. You will feel the speculum stretch your vagina open. Lock the speculum into place. Then you can let go of it. With both your hands free, you can now hold the flashlight and mirror. Shine the beam of the flashlight into the mirror so it reflects into the vagina lighting up the internal space. Or, shine the flashlight directly inside. Adjust the mirror and flashlight so you can see inside. At the back of your vagina is your cervix. It looks like a small donut with a very small opening in the center.

- 3 When you are finished, unlock and close the speculum. Then slowly and gently pull the speculum out. You may smell the speculum to become familiar with your natural smell of secretions and examine the mucus picked up on the speculum. An acidic smell is not unusual. A yeasty or fishy odor may indicate an infection.

## What You See

The cervix appears as a rounded or flattened knob about the size of a quarter or half-dollar. The hole or opening in the center is called the cervical os. If you cannot see your cervix, unlock the speculum , change the direction the bills are pointed, then reopen it. It may help to sit on a firmer surface, like the floor. If after a few tries you are unable to find your cervix, wait a few days and try again. The cervix moves somewhat during the menstrual cycle and may be easier to see in a few days.

## What's Healthy

Your cervix may be pink and smooth or it might have reddish blemishes. It can also be uneven, rough or splotchy. All of these are healthy. There may be mucus covering the cervix or coming out of the os. Mucus is natural. The character of the mucus changes throughout the menstrual cycle in response to hormones. It ranges from pasty-white (non-fertile) to a clear and stretchy egg-white texture (fertile). It does not have a strong odor. The cervix may have fluid-filled sacs on it that look like blisters. These are called Nabothian cysts and are not a problem. They are caused by a blockage in the mucus-producing glands of

the cervix. In some people they come and go, and others have them for years. They do not need treatment. You may see polyps, outgrowths of tissue that dangle on a stalk and protrude through the os. They may bleed easily but do not need to be removed unless they bother you.

Cervical bluing may be the first sign that a person is pregnant. Fifty percent of people who are pregnant will have a blue or purplish colored cervix due to an increase in blood circulation. During pregnancy, the cervix may also look puffy and softer and the os more open.

## What's Not Healthy

It is healthy to have vaginal and cervical discharge. However, if any of the following are found during self examination, it may indicate an infection - green, gray or dark yellow discharge, any significant change in the amount or consistency of discharge, any strong odor unusual for you.

A health professional can take a sampling of cells and send them to a lab for tests. You may choose to seek care from a clinician if you suspect an infection. Some infections, such as chlamydia or gonorrhea, can cause serious complications if left untreated. Other conditions may be easily addressed with natural remedies. When you have a Pap test, the clinician removes a few cells from the cervical os. The cells are sent to a laboratory and examined under a microscope for signs of cancer.

Your visual exam is not a replacement for a Pap smear. With the exception of visible sores caused by the herpes virus, most sexually transmitted diseases cannot be seen during self-exam. Chlamydia, gonorrhea, HIV/AIDS, hepatitis - all of these STD's need to be tested by a clinician and require prescription medication.

Recognizing what is normal for you is the primary reason for performing self exam. By knowing what is normal, you can tell what is unusual for you and seek appropriate treatment.

A "yeast infection" is an overgrowth of natural vaginal yeast. It can cause a white, cottage cheese-like discharge and usually causes uncomfortable itching. There are many ways to curb yeast overgrowth, including garlic vaginal suppositories, yogurt douches, herbal or natural treatments as well as over-the-counter medications.

information provided by <http://www.fwhc.org/health/selfcare.htm>

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