The Well Woman Visit is designed to ensure a woman is healthy inside and out. The visit is individualized and may consist of a brief physical assessment to check thyroid, heart, blood pressure and lungs, a breast exam to check for lumps or soreness, and a pelvic examination to assess the condition of the external and internal reproductive organs and screen for certain health problems.

What your check-up involves depends upon the discussion you have at the appointment with your clinician. The exam may or may not include a “pap smear” (a collection of cells from the surface of the cervix to screen for cervical cancer). Both the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the American Cancer Society recommend a first pap smear at age 21. Current recommendations for women ages 21–29 (with no history of an abnormal pap) are for testing once every three years after that. For women over age 30 with no abnormal history, screening is advised every 5 years. However, even without a pap, there are many good reasons to schedule a Well Woman Visit.

Some women use these visits to address questions or concerns about menstrual periods, pelvic pain, irregular bleeding or sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

**Topics for discussion**
During your exam, you will be asked specific questions related to your sexual development and activity. While these questions are personal, they are also medically-necessary in order to fully assess your health needs. The kinds of questions the clinician might ask will involve your menstrual history, whether or not you are sexually active (with men, women, or both), and the contraceptives and/or safer sex products you use. If you are ever unsure why your clinician asks a particular question, please ask.

**Confidentiality and comfort**
Remember, your discussions and health records are protected by strict confidentiality laws and procedures. We will not disclose information about your health care to anyone without your permission, even if you are under age 18. If you have questions about confidentiality and how it applies to your annual exam, medical bills, or health insurance, talk with us.

Our goal is to make you as comfortable as possible with the gynecological exam. We will listen to your questions, values, beliefs, and experiences with respect, and will do our best to accommodate any special needs that you have (e.g., seeing a particular provider, bringing a friend or partner with you).

**Other sexual health appointments**
Several other appointments are available to address other sexual health concerns. Some are with a nurse; others require a clinician:

1. **Contraceptive Options:**
   Students may meet with a sexual health nurse to learn about contraceptive options. This appointment is an opportunity to explore which method may be best-suited to your needs. Because this is a nurse visit, no exam is done, and no prescription can be given at that time. (Note: if you choose a prescription method of contraception, you will be offered an appointment with a clinician at another time.)

2. **STI Testing & Information:**
   If you have symptoms of an STI (genital discharge, itching, rashes, bumps, etc.) call and make an appointment for evaluation by a medical clinician (call 255-5155).

   If you do not have symptoms of infection but would like to learn more about STIs and be tested for infections, you may do so in a nurse visit (call 255-5155 or schedule an appointment via myGannett).

3. **Prescription Refill:**
   If you need a refill of a prescription contraception but do not need/want an exam, call 255-5155 and schedule a “contraception only” appointment with a clinician.

4. **Sexual Relationships/Sexual Function:**
   Gannett’s Clinical Counselor is available to meet with students (and their partners, if desired) to discuss a wide range of sexual topics including sexual identity, sexual function, and partner intimacy.

   We want to be sure you have the information and support necessary to address this important aspect of your health. You can find information about other dimensions of sexual health and health care on our website: www.gannett.cornell.edu. Be sure to check out our women’s health reading room (search: GynoCOLLEGE) where you will find a number of helpful fact sheets and other resources.

   If you cannot find what you need on our website, or if you prefer to speak directly with a nurse or Clinical Counselor, call Gannett during business hours.
Some visits will include a pelvic examination. Here is what you may expect...

When a pelvic exam is done, you will lie on your back with your feet in footrests at the end of the table. This may feel a bit awkward or embarrassing at first, but it truly is the best position to allow your clinician to see your external genitalia and then perform an internal examination. The pelvic exam is very brief and consists of two parts: an internal examination and a bimanual examination.

**THE INTERNAL EXAM**

In order to examine the inside of your vagina and see your cervix, your clinician will gently insert a plastic or metal instrument, called a speculum (see photo). Try to relax as much as you can during this exam. Your clinician will guide you through it. As the speculum is inserted and opened, you may feel some discomfort, but it should not be painful. Once the speculum is in place, your clinician can perform one or more of the following tests.

**A. Pap Smear:** Sometimes a pap smear is collected. A pap smear screens for cervical cancer. A tiny brush or “broom” is used to collect cells from the surface of the cervix. This sample is then sent to an outside lab to be evaluated. About 50% of women feel a brief pinching sensation during the pap, but other women feel nothing at all. Please talk with your provider to discuss whether you are due for a pap smear.

**B. Other Testing:** If requested (or if there is an abnormal appearance of the cervix or vagina), your clinician will test for infections (e.g. chlamydia or other sexually transmitted infections). A small swab is used to collect a sample. Some of these infections can be detected at the time of the visit by examining the sample under a microscope, but others require further testing in the laboratory.

**THE BIMANUAL EXAM**

After the speculum exam, the speculum will be removed and the clinician may do a bimanual exam by inserting two gloved fingers into your vagina and place the other hand on top of your lower abdomen. This allows him or her to feel the size, shape, and position of your uterus, ovaries and surrounding structures. You may feel a slight twinge when the ovaries are palpated - this is normal. If you feel any discomfort at any time during the internal exam, please be sure to let your clinician know.

Contact us:
Gannett is open Monday–Saturday, except for breaks. Check the website for hours: www.gannett.cornell.edu
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