Dear Alice,

When is it ok to start having sexual intercourse after having LEEP?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Great idea to ask before you leap? back into having sex. LEEP, or Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure, removes abnormal cells from a woman’s cervix. The abnormal cells may have been found during a Pap test, colposcopy, or biopsy. After LEEP, it’s commonly recommended to wait three to four weeks to have sexual intercourse or vaginal penetration. Even though a woman might feel fine after only a few days, the cervix has had sensitive tissue removed and needs time to heal. Everyone heals at a different rate; waiting three to four weeks helps ensure that a woman will be ready to have vaginal penetration safely and comfortably.

While a woman should avoid vaginal penetration immediately following LEEP, she may still consider the option of giving or receiving external pleasure and/or orgasms. If she is comfortable with it, then she can decide to have external stimulation (contact with outer genitalia), such as touching with hands and/or mouth, licking, and kissing.

During the weeks of recovery, there are steps a woman can take to ensure successful healing. Using sanitary pads to catch any bleeding from the procedure can help prevent irritation that tampons may cause. Consulting a health care provider before using tampons is recommended, whether to stop bleeding from the procedure or to manage routine menstrual bleeding up to two months after LEEP. It’s also a good idea to steer clear of excessive physical activity for the first 48 hours after the procedure and resume a regular exercise routine after about two weeks. Showering, bathing, or swimming is fine; douching or using a whirlpool or sauna should be avoided for a few weeks due to the risk of internal infection.

During recovery, it’s best to contact a health care provider if there any signals that could indicate an abnormal or negative reaction to the LEEP, including:

- Bleeding that seems excessive, contains clots, or continues beyond three weeks
- Yellow-colored or foul-smelling discharge
- Severe pelvic pain
- High fever and/or chills
A typical follow-up appointment with a health care provider is scheduled three to four weeks after having LEEP; which coincidentally is the perfect time to get the okay to resume vaginal penetration. Once cleared for vaginal sex, using barrier methods like condoms or dams (if they aren’t used already) to reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) may also be recommended. For more information about the LEEP procedure and what to expect, check out these websites from Johns Hopkins Health Library [3] and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) [4].

Here’s to many happy landings,

Alice!

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