Annual Exam and Pap Smear

What is an Annual Exam?

A yearly provider visit is suggested for all patients to discuss health history and gynecology care needs. Regular visits with your provider encourage and promote healthy living and prevention of common illnesses. Yearly visits to review personal and family risk factors provide the opportunity to discuss future family planning, STI prevention, and general health check ins. The visit will likely include a weight and blood pressure check, and based on your health needs may or may not include a physical exam, clinical breast exam, pelvic exam, Pap smear or various tests for sexually transmitted infections.

Who gets annual exams and when should they start?

Anyone who can use Campus Health can schedule an annual exam. Start anytime!

How often should I come to Campus Health for an annual exam?

Campus Health recommends you have an annual exam every year. This allows you and your provider to manage your health care needs more effectively.

What is the difference between a Pap smear and an annual exam?

The annual exam is done to check your overall physical health. The Pap smear screens for cervical cancer. A Pap smear may be offered as part of an annual exam. If you have a cervix and have ever been sexually active in any way, you need regular pap smears.

When do I need to start getting Pap smears?
Cervical cancer screening should begin at age 21 years. This is based on the very low incidence of cancer and a potential for adverse effects associated with follow up visits.

If your Pap smear is normal, you may not need to have another Pap smear for 3 to 5 years, depending on your age and the results of other recommended tests. Historically the pap smear has been an analysis of cells only, but new technology detects the genetic material of the human papillomavirus (HPV). Depending on your age, an added test to detect HPV may be done. If you are 30 or older, you may have a Pap test and an HPV test. If both these tests are negative, then you may go 5 years in between pap smears.

**Does a Pap smear hurt?**

A Pap smear should only take a few minutes. Some parts of the exam may be uncomfortable, but it should not be painful. If it hurts, be sure to tell your health care provider, who may be able to adjust things to help you be more comfortable.

This exam is for you, so don’t be afraid to speak up and do whatever helps you relax. Some patients find that breathing slowly and deeply while relaxing their abdomen helps. Others like to listen to their music on a personal music device during the exam. Some want to the health care provider to describe each step. Be sure to do and communicate what you think will help you the most.

**How much does the visit cost?**

The student health fee covers unlimited visits to Campus Health, so an annual exam visit is provided at no further cost to you. Procedures and lab tests that are sometimes offered during the visit may be charged to your insurance; the out-of-pocket cost to you for these specific services varies based on your insurance plan.

**Are sexually transmitted infection tests or a pregnancy test included in a Pap smear exam?**
A Pap smear screens for the effects of HPV [1] (human papillomavirus) in cervical cells. Screening for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy is not always done, however STI testing and pregnancy tests can be included in the visit when desired or indicated.

FYI: yearly Chlamydia screening is recommended for sexually active patients aged 16-24.

**How long does it take to get a Pap smear?**

The actual Pap smear should take only a few minutes. An entire annual exam- including health history, questions, and any other exams done during your visit (such as breast cancer screening, STI tests, or a bi-manual exam) means the overall visit will likely take about 30 minutes.

**How do I prepare myself for a Pap smear and/or annual exam?**

- Plan ahead.
- If you are getting a Pap smear, nothing should be in your vagina for 24 hours before your appointment (e.g. no sexual intercourse, douch, vaginal lubricants, creams or medications, no tampons). If you are having heavy bleeding with your monthly period, please call to reschedule your appointment. Light bleeding is not a problem.
- Complete your medical history form ahead of time and bring it to your appointment.
- Make a list of any questions you may have.
- Bring a friend if that would make you more comfortable.

**Who will be collecting my Pap smear?**

Trained medical providers in Gynecology or Primary Care Clinics are available to provide care. Discuss with the appointment schedulers whether you have a preference in the gender identity of your provider.

**How do I schedule an annual exam and/or Pap smear?**

You can schedule an annual exam by making an appointment with a primary care or
gynecology provider. [Schedule online or call.](https://campushealth.unc.edu/about-us/appointments) [2]

**Source URL:** https://campushealth.unc.edu/services/gynecology/annual-exam-and-pap-smear

**Links**