

Proctology Associates of Maine

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High Resolution Anoscopy [HRA]

Introduction

Your healthcare provider has recommended that you have a HRA exam. This handout will help you learn and understand what HRA testing is about and why it is important for you to have this procedure.

What is High Resolution Anoscopy (HRA)?

HRA is a careful examination of the genitals and the anal canal using a low-power microscope - which enables the examiner to see much more detail. HRA is usually performed on patients who have anal lesions, condyloma or are at high risk for anal pathology including anal cancer. Frequently during the procedure, small samples [biopsies] are taken for microscopic examination. HRA often follows a previously obtained abnormal Pap smear. The function of the Pap smear is to identify those individuals who may have abnormal cells [including from the Human Papillomavirus (HPV)]. The Pap is a good screening test, but it cannot tell us exactly where the problem is or how severe it might be. HRA and biopsy can give us this information.

What to expect

The whole exam is usually performed in a side-lying position. First, applying an anesthetic gel internally gently lubricates the anal canal. Following this, an anoscope is carefully inserted into the canal. The canal is then gently cleansed and swabbed using a cotton-tipped applicator with dilute- vinegar solution (acetic acid). Occasionally this solution may produce a very mild stinging. The acetic acid will be absorbed by any abnormal cells and allow the visualization of suspicious areas. Viewed through the anoscope, the practitioner will use a digital camera device to magnify the area and look around the anal canal for any suspicious lesions. Occasionally iodine (Lugol's) solution will also be swabbed on the surface to help visualize areas of concern. Next, if needed, a biopsy (the removal of tiny pieces of tissue) of the suspicious areas are taken. These are usually painless, but may feel like a mild pinch or tugging. Sometimes a tiny bit of bleeding can occur after a biopsy. A medication to stop bleeding called Monsel's solution may be used on the biopsy sites immediately after samples are taken. Later, after the procedure, this may cause a non-serious discharge that looks like coffee grounds for a day or two.

How to prepare

Men should not have anal sex or an enema for twenty-four hours prior to the visit. Women should also refrain from these activities along with douching for twenty- four hours since these activities may interfere with the examination. Also, no aspirin or any aspirin containing medications – or other blood thinners (unless you are advised otherwise) - should be taken up to one week prior to the exam because it could cause excessive bleeding during the biopsy.

How should I feel after the exam?

After the exam, there should be no significant discomfort, although there may be a small amount bloody discharge especially during bowel movements and with wiping for the next 2-3 days. **THIS IS NORMAL.** It is important not to put anything in the anus/rectum for one week while you are healing. This includes fingers, suppositories and enemas.

When will I learn about the results?

We send the biopsy specimen to the pathology department where they are specially prepared and then examined by the pathologist. The report is generated and then checked by your provider. **It is important for you to obtain your lab results by scheduling a regular follow-up.**

What are the possible findings on the HRA and/or biopsy?

- Normal: repeat anal Pap and HRA in **one year**.
- Low-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion (LSIL): repeat anal Pap and HRA in **3-6 months**.
- High-grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesion (HSIL):
 - repeat Pap and HRA in **3 months**, possibly with biopsy.
- Atypical Squamous Cells of Undetermined Significance (ASCUS):
 - repeat Pap and HRA with biopsy in **3 months**.
- Cancer: treatment required.

Follow-up

This is key. The only way to be certain that all the abnormal cells are gone is by repeating the Pap smears and HRA at appropriate time intervals. During this follow-up, you and your health care provider will be kept informed of the results of all tests performed.

If you should have any questions or concerns, please call the office.

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