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TEST PREP • PILL FAILS • GREEN TAMPONS

REPORT

WHAT GYNOS WISH YOU KNEW

All that stuff you spazz about pre-exam? Totally not worth your time. Here's what is.

BY KAREN ASP

IT'S NOT JUST YOU. Four out of five women purposefully slip into granny panties before their annual gyno checkup, according to a new survey from the National Association of Nurse Practitioners in Women's Health (NPWH). Seventy percent shave or wax in preparation, and 80 percent hide their bra and undies (no matter what style they're wearing) after undressing. Docs must be psyched we're all so considerate, right?



Actually, they couldn't care less. "We've seen it all," promises nurse practitioner Aimee Chism Holland, DNP, an assistant professor at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Excessive nervous sweating, funky discharge, full bushes—medical pros barely register these details, she says.

GOT STUBBLE?
YOUR DOC IS
WAY TOO BUSY
TO NOTICE.

Instead, they focus on the crucial stuff: checking for breast lumps, performing Pap smears, and scanning for STIs.

In fact, Holland and her peers wish 100 percent of us would obsess less about appearance and pay closer attention to the following pre-stirrups preparations.

Avoid Having an Exam During Your Period

This advice may seem obvious, but after waiting months for your appointment, it can be tempting to show up even if you're bleeding down below. **Big mistake.** Doing so could waste your time—or worse. "Too much blood on a Pap smear swab could create inaccurate results or even false positives," says Sherry Ross, MD, an ob-gyn at Providence Saint John's Health Center in Santa Monica. Plan ahead: If you take the Pill, predicting your cycle dates should be easy; if not, use a period tracking app such as Glow or Clue. If you're still spotting when exam day rolls around, don't panic—just tell your doctor. Anything heavier than that, though, requires rescheduling, says Dr. Ross.

Come Clean—but Don't Get Carried Away

The NPWH survey found that 7 in 10 women spend extra time washing up before a checkup, and that's fine. But docs say there is such a thing as too clean. "Showering or using a vaginal-hygiene wipe is sufficient prep," says

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PERCENT OF MEN AGES 23 TO 27 ARE INFECTED WITH HPV (THE HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS, AN STI THAT CAN LEAD TO CERVICAL CANCER). HELP STOP THE SPREAD—PROTECT YOURSELF BY USING CONDOMS AND CONSIDERING THE HPV VACCINE.

SOURCE: JAMA ONCOLOGY

Dr. Ross. Going further by douching, using scented body sprays or soaps, or scrubbing your vulva excessively can just lead to irritation or infection.

Drink Water... Lots of It

If you are among the 79 percent of women who wonder whether or not they should arrive at the doctor's office with a full bladder, the answer is yes. "Especially if you have been experiencing urinary-tract infection symptoms or think you could be pregnant," says Holland. "You'll need a urine sample for screening purposes."

Hold Off on Sex

Think of your vagina as a pro athlete who needs rest before the big day: no intimate activity for 24 to 48 hours in advance of your appointment. Foreign matter can interfere with your Pap test—especially semen, which has a habit of, um, sticking around. That said, if you do get busy the night before, don't try to fool your gyno: "We'll know even if you don't tell us," says Holland. Fess up fast, so your doc can factor it into your results. Don't be shy—remember, they've seen and heard it all. ■



HEALTH CHECK

DEVELOP A PILL HABIT

Fifty-four percent of women who take birth control reported flaking on their pills last month, per a recent survey by Bayer. Ladies, this is important! Missing more than one pill puts you in a complicated and risky position, says Alyssa Dweck, MD, an ob-gyn at the Mount Kisco Medical Group in Westchester County, New York. "Skip two and you'll need to take two one day and two the next to catch up," she says. "Forget more than twice and you'll need backup contraception for the rest of your cycle." She also warns that missing just one dose can trigger weeks of irregular bleeding. Set three reminders on your phone, three minutes apart, customized for maximum motivation. Use messages like: "Grab your birth control!" "Have you taken it yet?" and "Guess we're having a baby!" That should do it.



Ask
Dr.
Ashton

I'm curious about reusable tampons. Are they a good idea?

From money-saving and environmental standpoints, they sure seem like a decent concept. In reality, you'd need a ton of them—and you'd be washing them all the time. After the first use, they'll never be white again, but using bleach is a major no-no (remember, these go in your vag!). Without bleach, though, or if the tampons aren't washed and dried thoroughly, they might harbor bacteria. Bottom line: Tampons stay inside your body for four to six hours. Reusing them may be asking for trouble in terms of infection.

SOURCE: JENNIFER ASHTON, MD, OB-GYN AND ABC NEWS CHIEF WOMEN'S HEALTH CORRESPONDENT