Abnormal Pap Smear

Women are advised to have periodic Pap smears, because cancer of the cervix is a fairly common and sometimes fatal disease. A Pap smear checks cells from the cervix for any evidence of pre-cancerous or cancerous changes. If an abnormality is detected early, the doctor can prescribe effective treatment before the problem becomes more serious. Cervical dysplasia is a term used to describe abnormal cervical cells. Cervical dysplasia is usually graded according to its severity, which can range from mild inflammation to pre-cancerous changes to localized cancer. It is now known that the human papillomavirus (HPV), also the cause of genital warts, is the major cause of cervical dysplasia.

**Nutritional supplements that may be helpful:** Women with cervical dysplasia may have lower blood levels of beta-carotene and vitamin E compared to healthy women.1 Low levels of selenium2 and low dietary intake of vitamin C3 have also been observed in women with cervical dysplasia. Women with a low intake of vitamin A have an increased risk of abnormal Pap smear.4 These dietary associations do not necessarily indicate that these nutrients would be helpful if used as supplements. Rather, it is possible that women consuming more of these nutrients from their diets are eating more produce, and other substances in produce might account for protection.
In a double blind trial, when women with cervical abnormalities were given 500 mg of vitamin C and or 50,000 IU beta-carotene per day for two years, no significant evidence of improvement was seen, and those assigned to both supplements experienced a statistically insignificant worsening of their condition. Although the apparent association between these supplements and deterioration of the condition of the cervix appears to have been due to chance, there is currently no sound evidence supporting the use of vitamin C or beta-carotene supplements for people with cervical dysplasia.

Large amounts of folic acid—10 mg per day—have been shown to improve the abnormal Pap smears of women who are taking birth control pills. Folic acid does not improve the Pap smears of women who are not taking oral contraceptives. High blood levels of folic acid have been linked to protecting against the development of cervical dysplasia.

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Refer to the individual supplement for information about any side effects or interactions.

**Herbs that may be helpful:** Several herbs have been used by naturopathic physicians and other practitioners of natural medicine as part of an approach for women with mild cervical dysplasia. These include myrrh, echinacea, usnea, goldenseal, marshmallow, geranium, and yarrow. These are used for their anti-viral actions as well as to stimulate tissue healing. These are generally administered
in a suppository preparation. A doctor of natural medicine should be consulted to discuss the use and availability of these herbs.

**Are there any side effects or interactions?** Refer to the individual herb for information about any side effects or interactions.

**References:**


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