

## *First Gyn Examinations for Teens - From the desk of Deborah Bieter-Schultz, D.O.*

As female gynecologists and nurse practitioners (nps), we know you will probably never look forward to coming to our office, especially for your very first visit. However, the right time may be now! Experts in the field of Ob/Gyn recommend that young women have their first routine appointment between the ages of 13 and 15. If you are putting this off as long as possible, the latest you should schedule your first appointment is at age 21. Knowing what to expect can help overcome some of the normal anxiety you may be feeling about seeing a gynecologist. Be assured that you will be in control of what happens at your visits. If you are worried about having a pelvic exam, you may not need that part of the exam at your first or even your first several visits. You may decide that just meeting the doctor or np for a get to know one another visit is enough to start. Even if you are experiencing something out of the ordinary such as infrequent or prolonged periods or severe cramps, you may have the option of having an ultrasound instead of a pelvic exam.

One of the main goals of your first visit is to find someone with whom to comfortably discuss private matters as they arise in the future. Your visits are great opportunities for you to ask any potentially embarrassing questions you may have about your body (or anything else), so come prepared if you do have questions. At a typical appointment, your health care provider will want to discuss your general medical history as well as specifics about your menstrual cycle and how it affects your life. We will ask questions about your past sexual experiences, if any, and about any short term future plans you may have for having sex. For you to get the best possible care, it will be important for you to speak openly about these sensitive issues.

We will make every effort to speak to you privately unless you want your parent or guardian to be present. Confidentiality and trust are very important elements in the relationship you are establishing. If you are under 18 years old, you should know that your parents have the legal right to request a copy of your *written* medical records. However, we will not have any conversations about you without your knowledge and permission, and we will inform you before we provide records to anyone. You will have the option of having us keep certain information completely private.

The routine exam at a gynecologist's office usually involves a check of the thyroid gland in your neck, a breast exam, an abdominal exam and a pelvic exam. We will help you learn how to do a breast exam on yourself. For the breast, and abdominal exam, we will have you lie flat on your back. We will then have you bend your knees and place your feet in foot supports called stirrups for the pelvic exam.

Your doctor or np will first examine your external genitalia visually. A "speculum exam" will then be done if needed. Speculums are devices that allow your healthcare provider to look inside the vagina. They come in sizes small enough to use comfortably even on young children, and allow testing for certain infections. Once you are 21, a brief screening test for cervical cancer (a pap smear) will be done at least every 3-5 years as part of the speculum exam. The rest of the pelvic exam is called an internal or bimanual exam. This involves the doctor placing her gloved finger in the vagina and feeling your internal reproductive organs (the uterus, cervix and ovaries) between that finger and the other hand that is placed on the outside of your lower abdomen. You will feel some pressure during the exam, but the whole exam will take only a few moments and, unless you are already in pain, it need not be painful.

Ideally you will have your first appointment before you have your first sexual encounter. We want to help you protect yourself against sexually transmitted infections that might otherwise make it difficult for you to have children of your own some day, and we want to help you prevent pregnancy until you make a conscious decision to get pregnant.

Be proactive and optimize your reproductive health. We think there is no better way to do that than to start a trusting relationship with your gynecologist or gyn nurse practitioner.

The doctors and nurse practitioners at Great Valley Ob/Gyn in Exton and Paoli have the expertise needed to provide comprehensive gynecological and obstetrical services for teens and women of all ages. Please call our office or visit our website to request an appointment.

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