

# WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN VISITING A GYNAECOLOGIST

Answers to 33 frequently asked questions



"Women are amazing! We efficiently manage so many things: home, kids, family, work, and much more.

Are we giving the same priority to our health and ourselves?

This booklet provides some general tips on 'Taking care of our intimate health- our gifts as a woman'."

*Dr. Mrs. Sneha Joshi, Gynaecologist*

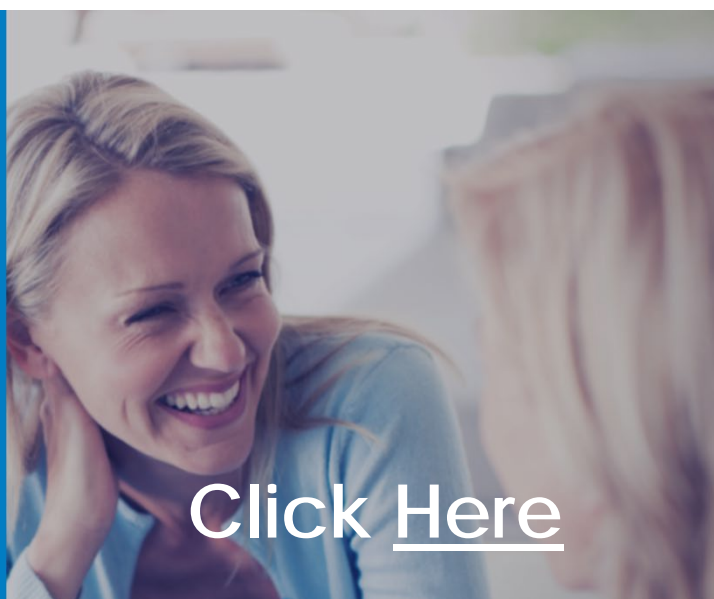


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### Authentic Resources

- Learn more about almost all Gynaecological conditions and procedures
- Share up-to-date information with your family and healthcare providers
- Make an informed decision about your care



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## The Importance of Intimate Health

For women, having a good intimate health i.e. health of their reproductive system, is an essential factor in living a better, happier life. Therefore, knowing more about intimate health and hygiene benefits all women.

From first menstruation, or even little earlier- (which would typically be from 10–12 years), it is a good idea to educate women about a variety of issues around intimate health. Our reproductive system is a marvelous example of nature's creation, and it is a complicated system.

Intimate health depends on genital hygiene, other health conditions, and sexual activity.

If not kept healthy, the reproductive system is vulnerable to a range of diseases, infections, and the inflammation processes. There is no better place to learn about these things than in a Gynaecologist visit.



Just as we take care of our teeth or our looks, we need to take care of our intimate health as well.



A Gynaecologist is a doctor that specializes in the reproductive system of women, and everything related to it – in a non-technical language, the 'science of women'.

However, for various reasons, many women dread the thought of visiting the Gynaecologist.

Therefore, we have created this little guide for some of the things you might want to know before you visit your Gynaecologist.

*Important Note: This is a general information booklet prepared by 'Advanced Gynaecology Newcastle Hunter' as part of Wellbeing Awareness Resources and is neither a medical advice nor a substitute for medical advice.*

## Answers to commonly asked general questions

### 1. When and why do you need to see a Gynaecologist?

Generally, a General Practitioner suggests a visit to a Gynaecologist when specialized care is required for a particular health condition, for example, incontinence, abnormal Pap Smear, bleeding or infertility.

In some cases, women self-refer when they notice something unusual with their intimate body parts and feel that specialised care is needed.



If you are experiencing pain or discomfort in your pelvic region or in intimate areas, or you see a rash or other skin disorders there or have irregular or heavy periods, then it is advisable to visit your Gynaecologist.

Ideally, it is better for women to visit the Gynaecologist before or at the onset of their first menstrual cycle, so that they understand the proper way to take care of their reproductive system. While a lot of information is available now-a-days on the internet or through other sources like friends and adults, such information is not always guaranteed to be reliable.

Women in some cultures visit a Gynaecologist every six months or annually as a part of a routine checkup, similar to the way that we care about our teeth or eyes.

### 2. What is the difference between an Obstetrician and a Gynaecologist?



Both are specialists in the care of women. Generally, a doctor trains as both- an Obstetrician and Gynaecologist.

However, they may choose to practice in both or one of the areas based on their passion and expertise.

Broadly speaking:

An Obstetrics practice is more focused on management of care during pregnancy and birth of a child.

A Gynaecology practice supports women in all aspects of their reproductive health, except pregnancy management and delivery.

Gynaecologists look after a range of issues including adolescent gynaecology, infertility, sexual health and conditions that affect the reproductive organs like endometriosis, heavy bleeding, or incontinence, to name a few.

### 3. What do I need to bring with me to my appointment?

- Referral from GP, if you have one
- Medicare card
- Private health insurance card
- Any relevant test results



Please also refer to the preparation-related questions (from page 8) in this booklet.

### 4. Is referral necessary while visiting the Gynaecologist?

A referral is useful as it informs the Gynaecologist of the condition you are coming to consult about. In Australia, you get Medicare rebate only if you have a referral.

However, in some cases patients self-refer, i.e. visit without a GP referral and some Gynaecologists will agree to consult based on such self-referral.



### 5. What if I want to see a different Gynaecologist from the one I was referred to by my General Practitioner?

Your General Practitioner will generally tend to refer you to a Gynaecologist with whom they have a good working relationship for some time.

However, if for some reason you wish to see a different Gynaecologist, either based on your own research or

recommendation of a friend, you can request that your General Practitioner issue a referral to that Gynaecologist.

As with any medical care, it is important that you are comfortable with your choice of Gynaecologist, as it is an important element in your health decision and outcomes.

## 6. What are the criteria for selecting a good Gynaecologist?



All Gynaecologists trained as a Fellow of RANZCOG are recommended, as they must achieve a certain standard of practice.

Before arranging a visit, you can research on Gynaecologist's website or through your support network of friends and family and, enquire about:

- Experience in practice of their specialty
- Use of modern surgical technologies
- Fees, if you are going to see them as a private patient
- Bedside mannerisms- each patient has personal preferences, but your support network's feedback will give some indication regarding this, in case you need a hospital procedure
- Availability of appointment compared to your urgency
- Experience you feel when you call at their rooms to book an appointment or for general enquiry

Online reviews are not always the best source of information as generally unhappy patients are more likely to invest time to write bad reviews, many times using false identities, compared to the satisfied patients.

## 7. Are there long waiting times before I can see a Gynaecologist?

Longer wait to get an appointment does not necessarily indicate popularity of that Specialist.



The time to get an appointment may vary based on a variety of factors as below:

- How many days of week they consult and how many days they operate
- Whether they are doing Obstetrics or just Gynae practice
- Whether they work only in private or public system - or both

- Practice processes i.e. number of patients seen each day, gap between appointments etc.

Typically, for a Gynaecologist working five days a week, only in the private system and not practicing obstetrics, you can get an appointment within three weeks.

## 8. How long usually does the appointment take?

30 minutes is a typical length for an initial consultation.

Check if the paperwork to be completed for your initial appointment can be emailed to you prior. If not, it's good to check prior with current social restrictions requirements at their practice and arrive 10 minutes early, as a lot of paperwork may be required to be filled in prior to the initial consultation.

## 9. Will I have an internal examination during a Gynaecologist visit?

Whether the Gynaecologist will perform an internal examination depends on what you are coming in for.

Mostly, an internal examination is performed as a standard practice if you are seeing the Gynaecologist for any condition associated with your intimate body parts or reproductive system.





## FAQs regarding Preparation for a Gynaecology appointment

### 10. Is there any preparation required for my appointment?



**The most important preparation is to be at ease.**

It is normal for women to experience some anxiety or concern before they go for their first visit to the Gynaecologist. It could be due to the discomfort of letting some other person examine your intimate body parts or maybe the fear of the unknown. However, there is nothing to

be afraid of, and any concern should not stop you from visiting the Gynaecologist.

Gynaecologists perform the intimate examination when it is necessary for diagnosis in their opinion. Try to think of this examination as if it is for any other body part which doctors examine – like your teeth, hand or ears.

### 11. There is no need to worry about how you look.



There is a common misconception that your intimate areas should be hairless, so the Gynaecologist can examine it better. However, this is just a myth.

According to the Gynaecologists, as long as good hygiene is maintained, looks of the pubic area are not at all important.

They examine the inner parts of your reproductive system to establish causes of infection or disease and are not interested in other aspects i.e. looks of your intimate parts.

## 12. Do not use soaps or any detergents to wash intimate parts

It's important to maintain a good intimate hygiene prior to visiting your Gynaecologist. You do not need to use soaps or detergent to wash your intimate body parts as in some cases they may cause a rash or some skin reaction. You are going to the doctor to fix any problems, if there are any, not to add to them!



Therefore, just washing your intimate part with water should suffice.

## 13. Be ready to discuss details of your medical history and conditions

The Gynaecologist will ask you everything about your medical history and your lifestyle – your overall health including mental health, the type of exercises you do or do not do, your menstrual cycle, any habits and addictions like smoking, pap smear history, and any significant health conditions.

Disclose openly all the information, as whatever you discuss is kept entirely confidential and will assist the Gynaecologist in providing the best suitable treatment options for your health condition.

## 14. Be open and honest about your sexual activity with your Gynaecologist.



Based on your sexual activity and history, your Gynaecologist can understand many important elements about your menstrual cycle and your overall intimate health.

Your Gynaecologist needs to know about the type of protection used during the intercourse or absence of it - and it's better to disclose if you are having unprotected sex! Many STDs (Sexual Transferred Diseases) are spread through sexual intercourse and may cause serious gynaecological



conditions. If it is possible that your partner has not been honest with you, you should discuss this with your Gynaecologist too.

Talk about any possible pains or cramps you experience during intercourse, the number of sexual partners (yes, it is important to disclose this and everything is kept very private between your Gynaecologist and you) and any other

conditions like the lack of natural lubrication, for example.

If you are experiencing any incontinence – that is leaking of urine, your Gynaecologist needs to know about it. Many women see the Gynaecologist directly without a referral because of this issue.

If you have experienced any sexual abuse at any time in your life, then please do not be afraid to mention this to your Gynaecologist; you are in safe hands. Such crucial information helps the Gynaecologists to better diagnose your condition and determine effective treatment. In some cases, young women experiencing active abuse have been relocated to better, safe surroundings.

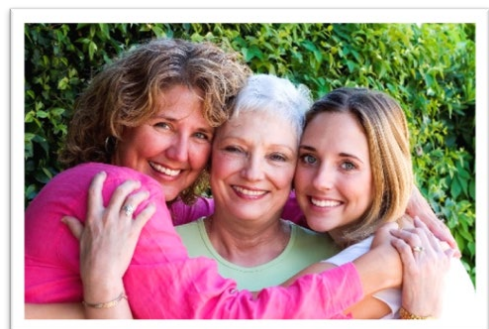
Please bear in mind that a Gynaecologist is not a sexologist, but one who deals with effects of your sexual activity on your reproductive system and health.

In addition, remember one thing – whatever the condition you are experiencing, **you are not alone**. Gynaecologists see many women with the conditions that you are experiencing and, therefore they are familiar with your challenges. So, you are better off sharing as much information as you can with your Gynaecologist. They are someone you can extend a great level of trust to and share such information.

## 15. Know your own medical history and your family medical history

Try to remember your own medical history – in terms of major and minor health conditions, events, surgeries, pregnancies and their approximate timeline.

As human body systems are interlinked with one another, it is important for your Gynaecologist to know if you ever had



depression or any minor or major operation in your abdominal region.



It is very important to disclose your family history in regard to the reproductive system. Always inform your Gynaecologist about any possible family diseases like diabetes or heart conditions, any cancers and such relevant information as the risk of pathological conditions that can affect your intimate areas may be related to your family history to some extent. Cancers of the reproductive organs in

the women are usually genetically linked, which means that you must recognise the gravitas and inform your Gynaecologist of any family history.

If you are trying to prevent pregnancy, you should consult with your doctor about the various pregnancy control options like the intrauterine device, patch or pills.

If you have completed your family and looking for permanent form of contraception discuss the same and talk about female and male sterilisation.

## 16. Are there any tests I should do prior to visiting the Gynaecologist?

Typically with your referral, your General Practitioner will advise you of any tests that you need to do before you visit a Gynaecologist.

It is important that you do those tests, as the Gynaecologist's treatment plan will depend upon the results of those tests.

In many cases, you can book an appointment with the Gynaecologist prior to doing the test prescribed by your GP so that when you do the test you can arrange for the results to be sent directly to the Gynaecologist.

This way, you might get an earlier appointment, and the Gynaecologist would have the results available.



### 17. Is it ok if I have my period at the time of my consult?

The answer to this depends on what you are coming for. If you are coming to insert an intra uterine device, or if the doctor needs to perform an examination by Colposcopy, if you have been diagnosed with Abnormal Pap Smear, then having the period may interfere and is not advised. If you are coming for any other reason, it is ok to attend during a period.

### 18. Can my partner or any support person accompany me during the general gynaecology appointment?



Yes, if you are comfortable discussing all the necessary information with the Gynaecologist in the presence of your support person.

In the case of a minor or a person with special needs, an adult support person is required.

A woman above 16 years of age can choose whether she needs a support person or not.

With recent Covid-19 pandemic, some practices may adopt a 'patient-only' policy except for patients with special needs and minors.

### 19. If I am coming for an infertility appointment, does my partner need to attend the appointment?

Yes, it is better if you and your partner can both be present for the appointment.

## 20. What is involved in an internal examination?

As a hand surgeon examines your hand, your Gynaecologist examines the intimate body parts.

For the internal examination, you are expected to sit on a special Gynae bed, which has leg rests that assist you to widen your legs so that the Gynaecologist can examine your intimate body parts, at times under a special light. In some cases, you may need to lie down.

### Pelvic examination

This procedure is more thorough and more detail-orientated one. The pelvic exam focuses on the physiological part of the intimate organs. However, it can also reveal any pathological process currently active in your reproduction system. There are three main aspects to this exam:

The first is the visual and physical inspection of your external intimate organs. This means that your vulva, labia, the pubic hair, and the opening of your vagina will be examined by the Gynaecologist.

The second type of pelvic exam is the speculum exam. This exam is done with the specific tool, called the 'speculum', which gently widens the vaginal space. With this widening, the Gynaecologist is able to see the cervix, which is located around 10 cm behind the vaginal space.



The third is bimanual exam. Your Gynaecologist will inform you that this process is a little bit invasive, but not harmful to you. The doctor will insert two fingers into your vaginal space, and their other hand will be placed on your abdomen. This method is used for assessing the size and the mobility of your uterus and your ovaries. This procedure should not scare you, although it may sound uncomfortable - you should not feel any pain at all!

## 21. How is hygiene ensured in the Gynecological practice?

In addition to thorough sanitisation, practices use disposable materials like bed covers, speculums etc to prevent the risk of infection.

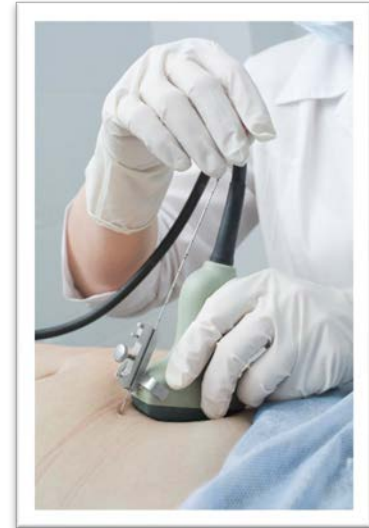
## PROCEDURE-RELATED QUESTIONS

### 22. What procedures are performed by the Gynaecologists?

The procedures performed by Gynaecologists can be classified under major and minor procedures depending upon the nature of the procedure and the risks involved.

All major and some minor procedures are performed in a hospital set-up, while a few minor procedures can be performed at consulting rooms-like taking a biopsy or inserting or removing an intra uterine device (IUD).

Gynaecologists trained in the latest technologies perform various procedures using keyhole (Laparoscopy) technique or robotic surgeries.



It is not possible to mention all procedures here due to space constraints, but for authentic, useful information about procedures and resources, click [here](#).

### 23. What procedures are performed at consulting rooms?

Some minor procedures that may be performed at consulting rooms include colposcopy (described later below), removal of a vaginal wart, removal or insertion of an IUD or taking biopsy.

Some Gynaecologists also perform non-surgical treatments like Gynaecological laser or Neuromodulation.

### 24. What do I need to prepare if I am coming for a procedure to be performed by the Gynaecologist?

When the minor procedure is performed at the consulting rooms, there is no preparation required.

However, if you are coming for a procedure and are concerned about the pain, then you can take any suitable painkiller half an hour before your appointment.

If it is a surgical procedure to be performed in the hospital, the Gynaecologist will give you all the paperwork and the preparation guidelines prior to the procedure, as part of detailed consent process.

### 25. Is there any anaesthetic required for the procedure, and can I drive afterwards?

If the procedure is to be performed at the hospital, the Gynaecologist will give you detailed paperwork, and you will receive the same from the anaesthetist, which will provide detailed instructions.



For minor procedures that may be performed at consulting rooms, either a local anaesthetic is given or no anaesthetic is required- as appropriate to the procedure. Such procedures are walk in and walk out, and you are fine to drive afterwards.

However, everybody reacts differently and hence if you feel more comfortable doing so, then please bring someone with you.

### 26. What is a Colposcopy?

Colposcopy is a procedure to closely examine your cervix, vagina, and vulva for signs of disease. During Colposcopy, your Gynaecologist uses a special instrument called Colposcope- a microscope used to examine the cells on the cervix.

Your doctor may recommend Colposcopy if your Pap test result is abnormal. If your doctor finds an unusual area of cells during the Colposcopy, a sample of tissue can be collected for laboratory testing (biopsy).





## 27. Will an Ultrasound be performed during the appointment?



Ultrasound is a commonly performed procedure by Gynaecologists.

This procedure can be used to see the shape and the condition of your ovaries, as well as your other internal reproductive organs (cervix, uterus, fallopian tubes).

There are multiple types of ultrasounds procedures, which allow the Gynaecologist to visualize a woman's reproductive system.

The transvaginal ultrasound is used regularly. The term means that the ultrasound is performed 'through the vagina'. The only preparation needed is to remove tampons in your vaginal space (if necessary) before the procedure, because they will block the signal and the picture from the probe inserted in the vaginal space.

The other common type of ultrasound is the Supra-pubic ultrasound. This type of ultrasound uses your bladder as a "window", where the doctor can see the shape and the state of the ovaries and the uterus, which are anatomically located behind the bladder. Prior to this ultrasound procedure, you may be asked to drink fluid in order to fill up the bladder.

## 28. How long one has to wait for a surgery date?

It depends upon the Gynaecologist in terms of urgency of your condition, whether you would be operated in private or public hospital, how far booked they are, whether they are doing obstetrics or doing only private Gynae work.

Generally, for a Gynaecologist working only in private practice, you can have a surgery within 3–4 weeks after your initial appointment.



## Fee-related questions

### 29. What are the fees to see a Gynaecologist?

As with other specialties, to see a Gynaecologist privately, you may have to pay consultation fees. If you are visiting Gynaecologists in a public hospital, you do not have to pay any fees upfront.

Gynaecologist fees can vary based on many factors, such as their experience, and the costs of running their practice - to name a few. While many Gynaecologist practices disclose fees on their website or while booking an appointment, it is always a good idea to ask about fees while booking an appointment.

In most cases, you can receive part of these consultation fees back from Medicare. Private health funds do not cover consultation fees but cover only in-hospital procedure-related fees.

If any procedure is required in consulting rooms, those fees are charged over and above consultation fees.

### 30. Are there any special rates for concession/pensioners in private practice?

It depends on the Gynaecologist practice. Please verify this when booking your appointment.

### 31. Is having private health insurance a must to see a Gynaecologist working as a private practitioner?

It depends on the Gynaecologist. Some Gynaecologists, who work as private practitioners, i.e. not in the public system, see patients only with the private health insurance.

However, some private practices welcome privately insured and uninsured patients both, with the proviso that the uninsured patients pay full fees out of pocket.

If you do not have private health insurance and need surgery through a private practitioner only operating in private hospital, you can do so by paying the complete costs out of pocket. In such case, practice staff will provide you with

a quote for Gynaecologist's surgical fees and an estimate for Anaesthetist's fees and hospital charges.

There are many examples where patients do keep aside a contingency fund instead of choosing a private health cover and pay doctors' fees and hospital charges out of such fund.

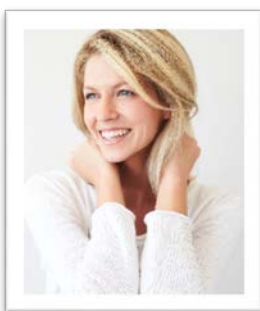
### 32. Do I offend the Gynaecologist if I ask many questions?

Do not be afraid or shy to ask questions. To get the best possible outcome, ask anything that you think is important and relevant to your health condition. It is vital that you fully understand everything about your health condition, so that you can take an informed decision. Because, at the end of the day we are talking about your personal health!

If you are visiting the Gynaecologist with a companion, such as your mother, and you do feel a little awkward to ask questions in front of her, you can always arrange to have a private conversation between you and your Gynaecologist.

In such cases, it is best to visit the Gynaecologist alone and talk in private about anything that is bothering you. These questions can be related to literally anything about your reproductive health.

### 33. How can I get the most out of my Gynaecologist appointment?



#### **Talk openly with your Gynaecologist and ask more questions**

A good Gynaecologist will be more than happy to communicate with you and answer all your questions about the kind of problem you are possibly facing when it comes to gynecological examination or your sexual health.

#### **Educate yourself more**

Self-education does not mean searching Google and read about all that can go wrong with your reproductive system.

To learn more about almost all Gynaecological conditions and procedures through authentic resources, click [here](#). These free pamphlets provide an up-to-date information that can be discussed with your family and healthcare providers to help you make an informed decision about your care.

This way, you can also learn more about the work of Gynaecologists.

**Feel free to share  
with your friends and family who may benefit**

Wellbeing Awareness Resource by



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