HOW TO REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF UNSATISFACTORY PAP SMEARS

ABOUT UNSATISFACTORY PAP SMEARS
An unsatisfactory Pap test result can be caused by a number of factors, including use of lubricants, excessive blood, and inadequate sample collection. These factors will cause a technical problem with the test and the laboratory staff cannot see the cells clearly enough to make a diagnosis.

The percentage of Pap smear test results deemed unsatisfactory ranges from about 1-2% in many laboratories, including PCL Alverno. But it is possible to reduce the number of unsatisfactory Pap test results and recollections.

POTENTIAL CAUSES

LUBRICANT
The recommendation for a patient without physical or physiologic reasons for needing lubricant is to use lukewarm water to warm to “lubricate” the speculum. If a lubricant is necessary, use a small amount of a water soluble gel lubricant on the sides of the speculum, not the tip.

Lubricants containing carbomers or carbopol polymers can have a marked adverse impact on cellularity, and are not recommended for use with the Hologic® ThinPrep Pap Test. Vaginal moisturizers, especially those of the bioadhesive type such as Replens, can also interfere with the Hologic® ThinPrep Pap. Use should be suspended a week prior to the test.

Two approved non-carbomer lubricants are:

Pap Test Lubricating Jelly, available from:
Aseptic Control Products, Inc.
P: 800.448.0131
info@ACPMedicalInc.com
www.ACPMedicalInc.com

Surgilube Lubricant
available for purchase through numerous medical distributors and GPOs, listed on their website www.surgilube.com

EXCESSIVE BLOOD
Menstrual blood can obscure the relevant cells, potentially masking a neoplasm. Therefore, it is preferable to avoid sample collection during menses. The patient should be advised to schedule her examination when she is not menstruating.

SPECIMEN COLLECTION
Specimen collection is a key factor in obtaining adequate cellular samples. Specimen collection for a Hologic® ThinPrep Pap smear requires either a spatula, brush, or broom device. When collecting specimens using these devices, it is important to use appropriate techniques.

SPATUAL COLLECTION TECHNIQUE
- Rotate the spatula 360 degrees around the entire exocervix while maintaining tight contact with the exocervical surface.
- Rinse the spatula in the PreservCyt by swirling vigorously in the vial 10 times.
- Discard the spatula.
BRUSH COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

- Insert the brush into the cervix until only the bottommost fibers are exposed.
- **Slowly rotate ¼ or ½ turn in one direction. Do not over-rotate.**
- Rinse the brush in the PreservCyt by rotating the brush in the vial 10 times while pushing against the vial wall.
- Swirl the brush vigorously to further release material.
- Discard the brush. **Do not leave the brush head in the vial (the cells may adhere to the brush head).**

BROOM COLLECTION TECHNIQUE

- Insert the central bristles of the broom into the endocervical canal deep enough to allow the shorter bristles to fully contact the ectocervix.
- Push gently, and **rotate the broom in a clockwise direction five times.**
- Rinse the broom in the PreservCyt by pushing the broom into the bottom of the vial 10 times.
- Swirl the broom vigorously to further release material.
- Discard the broom. **Do not leave the broom head in the vial (the cells may adhere to the broom head).**

ADVICE TO THE PATIENT

To ensure a satisfactory Pap smear test result, the patient can be advised to follow these tips PRIOR to their appointment:
1. Schedule their visit for two weeks after her period ends.
2. Refrain from sexual intercourse for 48 hours before visit.
3. Refrain from douching for 48 hours before visit.
4. Avoid using tampons or intravaginal medication for at least 48 hours before the examination to decrease the possibility that the number of exfoliated cells will be diminished or obscured by personal lubricants or spermicides.
5. Suspend use of vaginal moisturizers the week prior to visit.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information about the Hologic® ThinPrep Pap Test for your office and for your patients, you may also directly contact the technical support department of Hologic®; the manufacturing company of ThinPrep, at: 1.800.442.9892, Option 6.  
[http://www.thinprep.com/hcp/professional_resources.html](http://www.thinprep.com/hcp/professional_resources.html)

**Dr. Philip McGuire**, Medical Director of Cytopathology at PCL Alverno, is available to assist you as well and can be reached by phone: 219.989.3828 or email: [Philip.McGuire@franciscanalliance.org](mailto:Philip.McGuire@franciscanalliance.org)