**Get a smear test – it’s worth it!**

It might not be the most pleasant of experiences but regular cervical screening – or smear tests as some people call them – prevent three out of four cervical cancers from ever developing. This is because any changes to the skin cells in your cervix (the bit inside near your womb) can be found and treated before they develop into cervical cancer.

So if you get a letter asking you to book your test, it’s worth doing it straight away. Even if you had your letter a while ago you can still have the test – just ring up your doctor’s surgery and they will discuss it with you.

The test is free on the NHS and if you are aged 25 and over you will get a letter sent to you every three years inviting you to have the test, which is usually done by a nurse at your doctor’s surgery.

A smear test is totally private and only takes about five minutes. The nurse does loads of these tests each year so don’t be embarrassed about her seeing your private bits because she’s seen them in all shapes and sizes before!

Lots of women don’t like the thought of someone doing a test “down below” but it’s only a few minutes and it could save your life. If you are worried about pain or being embarrassed speak to your practice nurse first. She will be able to explain what is going to happen and how it might feel so you know what to expect. There are also some things you can do to make the experience work best for you:

* It’s almost always a female nurse or female doctor who does the test but you can always check when you ring to make the appointment.
* Try to relax – if you are tense it can be less comfortable. The nurse or doctor can help you to feel less nervous by explaining what they are going to do.
* Take your mum, a mate or your partner in with you - the nurse or doctor won’t mind!
* The test only takes a few minutes but you won’t be rushed and you can ask the nurse or doctor to slow down if you are nervous or feeling uncomfortable.
* Having a wee before you go in can make the test a bit more comfortable.

If you have any unusual symptoms, such as bleeding after sex or between periods, then don’t wait until your next smear test letter - you should visit your doctor to see if you need other investigations.

Find out more at [www.mysmeartest.co.uk](http://www.mysmeartest.co.uk)