LLETZ (large loop excision of the transformation zone)

LLETZ stands for large loop excision of the transformation zone. It is a treatment that can be done during colposcopy to remove cervical cell changes (abnormal cells).

This guide is for you if you have been offered or have had LLETZ. It may also be helpful if you are a partner, family or friend of someone in this situation.

Key points

- LLETZ is the most common treatment to remove cervical cell changes. It is usually done in hospital with a local anaesthetic.
- Straight after LLETZ you may experience some pain, vaginal bleeding and changes to vaginal discharge. These usually last between a few days and 4 weeks.
- Possible risks of LLETZ are an increased risk of late miscarriage or premature birth and cervical stenosis (narrowing of the cervix).
- If you have any physical or emotional effects after LLETZ, it is important to speak with your healthcare team so they can give you support.

Colposcopy

After cervical screening (your smear test), you may be invited to a colposcopy appointment. You are usually invited if your result shows human papillomavirus (HPV) and changes to some of the cells in your cervix. Colposcopy is where these cell changes are diagnosed, monitored or treated. This is important because there is a chance of these cell changes developing into cervical cancer without proper monitoring or treatment.
What happens during colposcopy?

You will meet a healthcare professional called a colposcopist, who will use a type of microscope called a colposcope to take a closer look at your cervix. They may offer you tests to help diagnose cell changes and decide whether you need any treatment. These tests may include:

- using different liquids to stain your cervix and show up any cell changes
- a biopsy, where a small piece of cervical tissue is removed and sent to the lab for testing.

If you need treatment, it may be offered during your first colposcopy appointment or you may be invited back to have treatment at another appointment.

Read more about colposcopy at jostrust.org.uk/colposcopy

A colposcopy examination
Making treatment decisions

Before making decisions about treatment, it is important you understand the procedure and possible effects. Your colposcopist should explain these to you but you may have lots of questions that you want to ask. You may also want to talk over your options with your family or friends.

It can help to write a list of the questions you want answered and take it to your appointment. The form below suggests some questions you might like to ask and has space for you to write down any others you think of.

Questions you could ask

What types of treatment can I have?

What does the treatment do?

How long will the treatment take?

Do I need to bring anything to the appointment?

Will I be able to get home by myself after treatment?

What physical effects might I experience after treatment?

What emotional effects might I experience after treatment?
If you are offered treatment during your first appointment, it is okay to ask for time to think about it. Your colposcopist should invite you to have a seat away from the examination bed to talk you through the treatment.

**About LLETZ**

LLETZ is the most common treatment for removing cell changes from your cervix. It uses a thin wire loop with an electrical current to remove the affected area of the cervix.

You usually have LLETZ as an outpatient. This means you have it in an examination room at a hospital, but can go home afterwards. LLETZ is usually done with a local anaesthetic, but occasionally you may be offered LLETZ under a general anaesthetic.

**LLETZ treatment**

What happens during LLETZ?

Like during cervical screening, your colposcopist will gently put a clean speculum into your vagina. They will then inject a local anaesthetic into your cervix. This means you are awake, but the area that needs treating is numb (you can’t feel it). The injection might sting for a short time.

You may also have a sticky pad put onto on your leg. This makes sure the electric current doesn’t shock you or the colposcopist.
Once your cervix is numb, your colposcopist removes the area of your cervix which has cell changes with the loop. It is normal to notice a slight burning smell and hear a noise like a soft vacuum cleaner. The loop cuts the tissue and seals the cut at the same time. This should not be painful, but you may feel some pressure.

The area of your cervix which has been removed is sent to a laboratory to check what kind of cell changes you had and whether all of them have been removed – this is sometimes called having clear margins.

You may have some bleeding straight after LLETZ. Your colposcopist should have some sanitary pads, but you might like to bring your own.

**What can and can’t I do after LLETZ?**

You may have some physical effects after LLETZ (see page 5). These usually last up to 4 weeks. Until these have stopped, it is best to avoid:

- tampons – you can use a sanitary pad instead
- penetrative vaginal sex – including fingers, tongues and other objects
- heavy exercise
- swimming.

Try to wait for about 4 weeks after treatment before going on holiday or flying. Some travel insurance companies will not provide health insurance straight after treatment and any effects will usually have stopped by then.

If you have any questions about what you can and can’t do after LLETZ, speak with your colposcopist.

**Benefits and possible risks of LLETZ**

LLETZ is considered a safe treatment that has been approved by health organisations in the UK. It is usually successful and over 9 in 10 people do not have cell changes again.

Like all treatments, LLETZ has some possible risks:

**Miscarriage and premature birth**

Most LLETZ treatments remove less than 10mm of your cervix. If more than 10mm of your cervix is removed, there is an increased risk of late miscarriage or premature birth (before 37 weeks) in
your next pregnancy. If you have had LLETZ and become pregnant, you should tell your healthcare professional that you have had the treatment. This is so that you can be referred to a specialist in preventing preterm birth.

**Cervical stenosis**

There is a small chance that your cervix will narrow and become scarred. This is called cervical stenosis. If this happens, the passage between the womb and vagina can become partly or fully blocked. This may cause changes to your periods and fertility. Cervical stenosis is more likely if you have been through menopause, have had more than one treatment or if the treatment removes a large area of your cervix. It can be treated with cervical dilators to help widen the cervix or laser treatment to remove scar tissue.

If you are worried about these risks, speak with your colposcopist before treatment. They can answer your questions and give you support. After treatment, your GP or another healthcare professional will be able to offer support.

**About intimate examinations**

The nature of gynaecological and obstetric care means that intimate examinations are often necessary. We understand that for some people, particularly those who may have anxiety or who have experienced trauma, physical or sexual abuse, such examinations can be very difficult. If you feel uncomfortable, anxious or distressed at any time before, during, or after an examination, please let your healthcare professionals know. If you find this difficult to talk about, you may communicate your feelings in writing. Your healthcare professionals are there to help and they can offer alternative options and support for you. Remember that you can always ask them to stop at any time and that you are entitled to ask for a chaperone to be present. You can also bring a friend or relative if you wish.

**Recovery after LLETZ**

After LLETZ, you may have some effects caused by the treatment. Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust has spoken with women who have had LLETZ to understand their experiences and help you prepare for the possible effects of treatment. It is important to remember that everyone heals at a different pace and will have a different experience.

**Common and expected effects of LLETZ**
There are some effects that are common and expected after LLETZ. These usually last for anywhere between 2 days to 4 weeks after treatment.

**Pain**

Some people have cramping pain, like a period. The pain varies from person to person, but some pain is expected for a day or 2 after treatment.

If you are in a lot of pain or find it is affecting your day-to-day life, speak with your health care professional. They can offer reassurance based on your medical history and, if needed, will be able to check you are healing properly.

**Bleeding**

After LLETZ, a soft scab forms on the cervix where the cells were removed. It may cause bleeding while it heals. This can last about 4 weeks.

Any bleeding is usually like a slightly heavy period. About 10 days after treatment, the bleeding may get heavier. This is normal and a sign that the scab is healing.

Your first period after treatment may be slightly heavier or out-of-sync with your regular cycle.

If the bleeding is very heavy and you are soaking through a sanitary pad every few hours, it is important you go to the hospital straight away. It may not be anything to worry about, but the doctors can check everything is okay and give you the right care.

**Changes to your vaginal discharge**

The soft scab on your cervix after LLETZ may also cause changes to your vaginal discharge. This can last about 4 weeks.

Straight after treatment, you may have a watery vaginal discharge. About 10 days after treatment, many women notice a coffee granule-like vaginal discharge. This is normal and a sign that the scab is healing.

There is a small risk of developing an infection after LLETZ. Speak with your healthcare professional if your vaginal discharge smells bad or is a yellow or green colour. You will be offered antibiotics if there is a chance you have an infection.

**Other possible effects of LLETZ**
You may only have expected effects after LLETZ, but there is a chance you may have some other physical and emotional effects. If you do, this information explains how these effects might impact your life and explain where to get support.

**Your feelings**

You may have some strong feelings about what LLETZ means for your physical wellbeing and future. This could be a positive feeling, such as relief that you have had treatment, but you may also feel worried about how your body will recover.

You may be worried about:

- whether the treatment has worked
- whether you will continue to experience physical effects
- whether you will go on to develop cervical cancer
- whether you will be able to have a child or more children.

If they aren't addressed, these worries may develop further into anxiety or depression. This could be a general feeling or triggered by certain things that remind you of LLETZ, like having cramps or visiting the GP.

All of your feelings and concerns, including any we don’t mention in this guide, are valid and it is important you get the right support to deal with them. Here are some of the ways you could get support:

- Lean on your loved ones. Some women find that a support network of friends and family helps their emotional recovery after LLETZ. There are lots of ways they can help, from talking your feelings through, to offering a distraction and positive presence.

- Speak with your GP or another trusted healthcare professional. Before, during and after LLETZ, you will be in the care of professionals who want to make the experience as good as possible for you. If you are worried about anything, talk to them so they can give you the right support and ease any concerns.

- Get support from Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust and other charities. There are many charities and organisations who offer support services so you can feel listened to and work through your feelings (see page 8). These services can also signpost to other places that may be
able to help.

- Ask for a referral to counselling. If you feel that some expert support would help, you can ask your GP to make a referral for NHS counselling. You can also make an appointment privately, for a cost. You can search for a private counsellor at [bacp.co.uk/therapists](http://bacp.co.uk/therapists)

**Sex and relationships**

Some women feel differently about sex and intimacy after LLETZ, which sometimes has an impact on their relationships. Feeling differently about sex and intimacy could be because of physical or emotional changes, including:

- pain during and after sex
- bleeding during and after sex
- feeling less attractive or confident
- worries about passing on HPV.

If you have pain or bleeding, it is important to see your GP. They can make sure it is nothing to worry about and talk through ways to make it better. For example, using more lubricant during sex may lessen any pain.

It may help to speak to a trusted person about any loss of confidence – whether that is a partner, family, friends, your GP, or other people who have had LLETZ. Talking through your worries might ease them or give you some new ideas about how to handle them.

If you and a partner are struggling to reconnect after LLETZ, you may want to consider couples counselling. An unbiased expert can help you start and explore conversations around sex and intimacy, so you can find solutions together. You can search for a local counsellor at [bacp.co.uk/therapists](http://bacp.co.uk/therapists)

**Lasting pelvic pain**

While some pain is expected for a couple of days after LLETZ, some women have pain for longer. We don’t know if this is directly because of the treatment or because of other conditions or life events that have happened since treatment.

If you experience lasting pelvic pain, it is important to speak with your healthcare professional. They can investigate the cause of your pain further and offer some support.

**Other issues**
There is a small chance you may experience other effects after LLETZ. A few women that we have spoken with say their periods have changed, cervical screening is more uncomfortable or they no longer feel the same sensations during sex. We don't know if this is directly because of the treatment or other conditions or life events that have happened since treatment.

If you experience these effects, or anything we don’t mention in this guide, speak with your healthcare professional. They will be able to offer you further support based on your individual circumstances.

**More information and support**

We know that having cervical cell changes that need treatment can be worrying and we hope this guide has helped you feel more prepared. Remember, your healthcare team are there to support you at every stage.

If you have general questions about LLETZ, Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust can also help:

- For emotional support, call our free Helpline on **0808 802 8000**. Check the opening hours at [jostrust.org.uk/helpline](http://jostrust.org.uk/helpline)
- If you have a medical question, you can submit it to our panel of experts at [jostrust.org.uk/ask-expert](http://jostrust.org.uk/ask-expert)
- Join our online forum to talk with other people going through a similar experience at [jostrust.org.uk/forum](http://jostrust.org.uk/forum)

Jo’s Cervical Cancer Trust cannot give you medical advice or answers about any results. In this case, it is best to speak with your healthcare professional.

Thank you to all the experts who checked the accuracy of this information and the volunteers who shared their personal experience to help us develop it. We write our information based on literature searches and expert review. For more information about the references we used, please contact info@jostrust.org.uk
Words we use

In this guide, we use some medical words. Your doctor may also use medical words to explain appointments and treatments to you. Here are some commonly used medical words and what they mean.

- Abnormal cells – Cells that change or behave in a way that they should not. In this guide, we call them cell changes.
- Biopsy – A sample of tissue being removed from the body to see if there are cell changes.
- Cervical screening – A free test to check your cervix is healthy. It is sometimes called a smear test.
- Cervix – The part of the body that joins the womb to the top of the vagina.
- Clear margins – No cell changes are present along the edge of tissue removed during treatment.
- Colposcope – A type of microscope used to see the cervix in detail. It stays outside the body.
- Colposcopist or colposcopy nurse specialist – A doctor or nurse who has completed medical or nursing training and continued onto colposcopy training. They are sometimes called a nurse colposcopist.
- Colposcopy – A hospital examination used to diagnose, monitor and treat cervical cell changes.
- Human papillomavirus or HPV – A common virus that most men and women will have at some point in their life. In most people, HPV will go away by itself without causing problems. A few types of HPV can cause cell changes that may develop into cancer.
- ‘See and treat’ – A phrase sometimes used to describe someone’s first colposcopy appointment where treatment is offered on the same day.
- Speculum – A plastic or metal cylinder with a round end that can open. It is used during cervical screening and colposcopy.
- Vaginal discharge – A fluid or mucus that keeps the vagina clean and moist. It also protects the vagina from infections.