

# Women's Health Information and Advice

## Transvaginal Mesh Implants

- The Scottish Mesh Survivors Group (<http://www.scottishmeshsurvivors.com/index.html>) provides comprehensive advice and support for women who have undergone this procedure. Their website offers information about mesh, including frequently asked questions, as well as links to the Group's petition within the Scottish Parliament.
- As a result of the work of the women in the Mesh Survivors Group, the Public Petitions Committee at the Scottish Parliament has called upon on the Scottish Government to halt the use of mesh procedures in Scotland, until there is confidence in the findings of the Independent Review set up to examine the controversial procedure. More information can be found here: <http://www.parliament.scot/newsandmediacentre/109378.aspx>
- The Transvaginal Mesh Implants Oversight Group (TVMO) was established by Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS). The TVMO has been asked by the Scottish Government to ensure that any patient information is up-to-date and appropriate. In order for this to happen, a patient information subgroup will be formed. Further information about the work of this group can be found here: [http://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our\\_work/technologies\\_and\\_medicines/programme\\_resources/transvaginal\\_mesh\\_implants.aspx](http://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/our_work/technologies_and_medicines/programme_resources/transvaginal_mesh_implants.aspx)

## Thyroid Health

It is clear that women with poor thyroid health can find it very difficult to obtain an accurate diagnosis and accurate treatment for their condition. Thyroid UK, the key organisation dealing with thyroid health, provides detailed information for those who are seeking medical assistance. The 'Getting a Diagnosis and Starting Treatment' section on their website ([http://www.thyroiduk.org/tuk/diagnosis/getting\\_diagnosis.html](http://www.thyroiduk.org/tuk/diagnosis/getting_diagnosis.html)) provides a step-by-step guide from making an appointment to obtaining a diagnosis. The website also has advice on treatment, and offers links to support groups for women with these conditions.

Lorraine Cleaver, who spoke at the SWC Health Conference, lodged a petition at the Scottish Parliament in 2012. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to ensure GPs and endocrinologists are able to accurately diagnose thyroid and adrenal disorders and provide the most appropriate treatment. The issue has been under consideration since then, and most recently a debate was held in Parliament.

- ⇒ The petition can be accessed at <http://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01463>
- ⇒ The text of the debate is available at <http://www.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/report.aspx?r=11214&mode=pdf>

# Breast Screening and Cancer Detection

## Self Examination

Women have made clear that one of the main reasons they do not regularly check their breasts for lumps and changes is because they are unsure as to what they are looking for. With that in mind, the SWC has created a 'checklist', made up of information from various breast cancer resources, links to which are also detailed below.

Most information sources suggest checking yourself in the bath or the shower, or to look in the mirror while you're doing it. You should visit your GP if you experience any of these symptoms. There may be nothing to worry about, but it is better to get checked out - **early detection is vital!**

### Look for

- Changes in the skin texture of your breast, such as puckering and dimpling.
- Swelling in your armpit, or around your collarbone.
- Nipple discharge or bleeding.
- A sudden, unusual change in the size and/or shape of your breasts.
- Nipple inversion or changes in direction - e.g. if the nipple starts to point up, down, or any other way than it normally would.
- A rash or crusting around the nipple or surrounding area.
- A moist, red area on your nipple that does not heal easily.

### Feel for

- Lumps, thickening or any bumpy areas which are not normally there.
- A constant, unusual pain in your breast or armpit.

You can find further information about self-examination here:

- ⇒ NHS - <https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/womens-health/how-should-i-check-my-breasts/>
- ⇒ Coppafeel - <https://coppafeel.org/your-boobs/>
- ⇒ Breast Cancer Care - <https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support/have-i-got-breast-cancer/signs-symptoms-breast-cancer>

### Other Useful Links

- ⇒ Breast Cancer Now - <https://breastcancernow.org/about-us/what-we-do/breast-cancer-now-in-scotland>
- ⇒ Macmillan Cancer Support - <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/fundraising/inyourarea/scotland/scotland.aspx>
- ⇒ Maggie's Centres - <https://www.maggiescentres.org/>
- ⇒ Beatson Cancer Centre - <https://www.beatson.scot.nhs.uk/content/>
- ⇒ BECCA Breast Cancer App - <https://www.breastcancercare.org.uk/information-support/support-you/becca>
- ⇒ Breast Cancer Screening Information - <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/breast-cancer-screening/>

# Cervical Screening and Cancer Detection

Many women have demonstrated a reluctance to attend a smear test because they are embarrassed, or because they are worried that it will be painful. Below is a short guide as to what really happens when a patient undergoes this procedure.

## Having a Smear Test

- Prior to the test, you will be asked to confirm the first day of your last period.
- The nurse will ask you to undress from the waist down - yes, you can keep your socks on!
- You will be offered a sheet or a blanket to cover the lower part of your body - if the nurse doesn't offer one, you can ask.
- Once you are on the bed you will be asked to bend your knees, bring your ankles together and let your legs fall apart.
- A device called a speculum will be inserted into your vagina to hold it open, and the nurse will use a soft brush to collect sample cells from your cervix.
- The procedure may not always be straightforward - some women have a tilted cervix, for example, which can make it more difficult for the nurse to collect a sample.
- Overall, however, it should be fairly quick and somewhat uncomfortable. You will be asked to put your clothes back on and the nurse will collect your sample into a small tube and send it to the laboratory for testing.

## Test Results

- Results will usually be sent out in the post within 4-6 weeks - they will be sent to both the patient and their doctor. There are four possible outcomes.
- The most common result is *no changes to cells*. Women will be invited to have another smear test in 3-5 years, depending on the age of the patient.
- Sometimes there were *not enough cells to test*. This is not unusual, it just means that women will be invited to repeat the test in 3 months.
- *Minor changes* can clear up on their own and often do not need any treatment. They will be monitored - women will be asked to have another smear test in a few months.
- *Changes which require further investigation* occur in roughly 1 in 10 cases and means it is necessary to treat abnormal cells before they turn into cancer. A procedure known as a colposcopy will be used to determine whether treatment is required. Treatment is simple and women tend to be seen as an outpatient.

## Useful Links

- ⇒ NHS Inform - <https://www.nhsinform.scot/healthy-living/screening/cervical/cervical-screening-smear-test>
- ⇒ Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust - <https://www.jostrust.org.uk/>
- ⇒ The Eve Appeal - <https://eveappeal.org.uk/gynaecological-cancers/cervical-cancer/>
- ⇒ Macmillan Support - <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/cervical-cancer>