

# Vaginal Examinations



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Patient information

## Vaginal Examinations in labour (also known as VEs)

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## **Vaginal examinations (also known as VEs) are offered to assess:**

- the opening (dilation)
- softening and thinning (effacement) of your cervix during labour
- to decide whether labour is “established” or active
- they can also help doctors and midwives to assess the position of your baby.

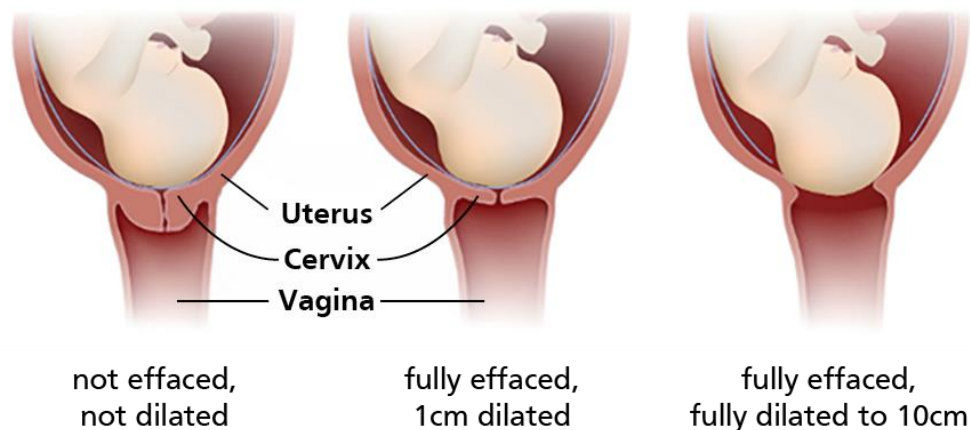
Your midwife or doctor will ask for your consent to do a VE. They gently insert two gloved fingers into your vagina to assess your cervix. They will use lubricating gel to make this more comfortable for you. You can ask them to stop at any time.

Your midwife can share the findings of the examination with you once it is complete. Some women want to know how many centimetres they are dilated, others prefer not to know. Let your midwife know your preferences so they can best support you.

## **During a vaginal examination, the cervix is assessed to understand:**

- How long it is
- How thick it is
- How open it is
- How soft or firm it is
- Where it is positioned
- If it is close to the baby’s head
- If the waters around the baby are intact.

## **Cervical effacement and dilation**



## **Why would I need a vaginal exam?**

- To do a membrane sweep
- To assess induction of labour
- To insert a cervical balloon or medication needed for induction of labour
- To break your waters
- To assess your progress in labour.

## **How can I feel more comfortable during a VE?**

You may find a vaginal exam uncomfortable. You can ask for the exam to be stopped at any time.

There are things the doctors and midwives can do to make you as comfortable as possible during a VE:

- Offer a chaperone to be present
- Ask people to leave the room if you would prefer privacy
- Offer suitable pain relief such as gas and air
- Using relaxation/breathing techniques
- Offer to explain what they're doing, or stay silent if you would prefer.

## **Your Consent**

You can say yes to some vaginal examinations and no to others. If you don't understand why a vaginal examination needs to be done, you can ask your midwife or doctor to explain it (if any words are used that you don't understand, you can ask them what they mean).

You can ask the examination to be stopped at any point, and let the midwife or doctor know if you'd prefer to say a key word, raise your hand, etc.

## **Vaginal examinations during induction of labour**

Vaginal examinations are essential during induction of labour. During induction of labour, you will need more vaginal examinations compared to if you were not having an induction of labour. Please speak to your midwife as soon as possible if you are worried about having vaginal examinations.

## **Tools Used**

- Speculum

## **Specific Considerations (from Royal College of Nursing)**

Special consideration should be given with vulnerable groups. The examination can be hindered or limited if a woman has had previous experiences that may make this examination traumatic, or if the experience itself requires particular care. Caregivers need to be sensitive to the fact that some women presenting may have suffered some form of sexual abuse.

Women who experience difficulty with vaginal examination should be given the opportunity to discuss any underlying sexual, marital or trauma related issues.

These discussions should take place when the woman is dressed if possible. Some women may experience distress without any underlying history of sexual abuse or difficulties.

From AIMS - <https://www.aims.org.uk/information/item/vaginal-examinations>

## What do vaginal examinations feel like?

VEs are experienced very differently by everyone. Some people don't mind them, others find them to be uncomfortable or painful. For some, having fingers inserted into their vagina can be a distressing experience; this is especially common for people who have experienced sexual abuse, although anyone can feel this way.

## Using Vaginal examinations to estimate the progression of labour

It is very normal, when talking about birth, to hear the midwife or doctor mention the number of centimetres dilated. Your cervix needs to dilate from closed or nearly closed to around 10cm in order for your baby to be born. But it is important to know that this is not an exact measurement, and even two people can sometimes give you different results. However, all the cervix needs to be is fully open to allow the baby to pass through.

Not everyone dilates to exactly 10cm. What is really happening is that the cervix opens sufficiently to allow the baby to pass through. Again, this is not an exact measurement.

Because the cervix dilates from a small opening before labour to around 10cm as the baby is ready to be born, it might seem logical to assume that at 5cm labour is halfway through. This, however, is not true. The opening of the cervix is not linear. For example, it may take 10 hours of labour to reach 3cm, then jump to 10cm in an hour. Or it may go from closed to completely open in two hours. It may even be at 2cm for three weeks, before taking 8 hours to be ready for birth. Therefore, it is clear that what the cervix has done previously cannot tell us what it will do in the future. It may sometimes give us an idea of what to expect when someone is in labour, which is discussed below, but it does not tell us when the baby or babies will be born.

## How to contact us

Infant feeding team

Maternity

Women's and children's building

[Watford General Hospital \(website\)](#)

Vicarage Road

Watford

Hertfordshire WD18 0HB

Direct line: 019234 36007 (ext: 6007)

Hospital switchboard: 01923 244366

## Useful web addresses

PALS: [www.westhertshospitals.nhs.uk/patientexperience/pals.asp](http://www.westhertshospitals.nhs.uk/patientexperience/pals.asp)

Watford hospital information: [www.westhertshospitals.nhs.uk](http://www.westhertshospitals.nhs.uk)

Saba parking: [www.sabaparking.co.uk/app](http://www.sabaparking.co.uk/app)

## Where can I park?

Car parking at Watford General Hospital is available in the [multi-storey car park](#). It's pay on exit, so you only pay for the time you need. You can pay by cash or card. The post code for the car park is **WD18 0LT**.

The external car park ticket machines on all sites **only accept cash**. However, you can pay by card via the [Saba parking app](#) (excluding AMEX), or search Saba parking app at the [App store](#) or [Google play](#).

**Please note:** due to current redevelopment works at St Albans, parking is very limited.

For more information about travelling to our sites and travel concessions, visit our [website](#).

## PALS

If you need this leaflet in another **language, large print, Braille or audio version**, please call **01923 217198** or email [westherts.pals@nhs.net](mailto:westherts.pals@nhs.net).



Language



Large Print



Braille



Audio

### Concerns, complaints or suggestions

If you are unhappy with your experience or would like to give feedback, please contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). PALS is available to patients, relatives, carers and friends to raise concerns.

For more information, please scan the QR code or visit our [website](#).



### No smoking policy

**We have a strict no smoking policy.** Smoking, including e-cigarettes is not permitted anywhere on any of the hospital sites.

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|------------------------|---------------------|
| Department             | Maternity           |
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