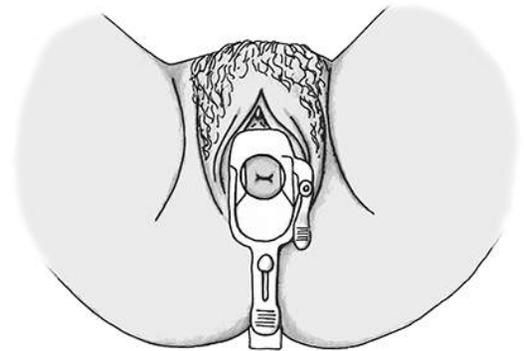
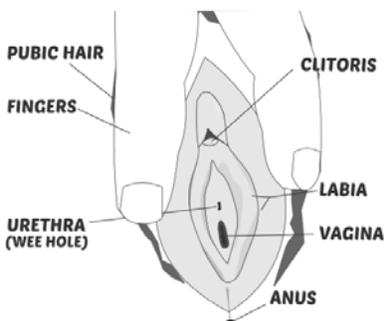


## THE GYNECOLOGICAL EXAM

The gynecological (or pelvic) exam implies that the external and internal genitalia (or the female parts) are to be examined for various reasons. The exam has usually 3 parts, and it takes less than 5 minutes:

1. **EXAMINATION OF THE EXTERNAL GENITALIA** (or the vulva). This is achieved by inspecting or looking at the vulvar skin for signs of infections, sores, skin changes, warts, tags, cysts, bumps and anatomical defects. To examine the inner part of the labia, these will need to be separated open, and checked for similar conditions as above, plus unusual tenderness around the vestibule (entrance of the vagina), lack of estrogen, and conditions around the urethra. The area between the vagina and the anus, called the perineum, also needs inspection.

### THE VULVA



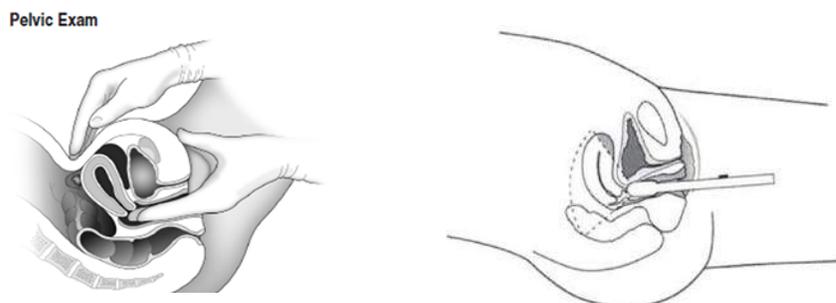
2. **SPECULUM EXAMINATION.** It involves the insertion of a lubricated and usually warm closed speculum, which is then slowly opened to separate the vaginal walls. This provides a view of the vaginal walls and the cervix. If the muscles are relaxed, the speculum should only cause a small amount of pressure or a slight discomfort.

If required, a pap test or swabs may be obtained from the cervix or vagina. The swabs are to check for sexual transmitted diseases (STDs) or causes of vaginal infections (vaginitis). Depending on the clinical situation, the swabs may be used to detect chlamydia, gonorrhea, trichomonas, bacterial vaginosis and yeasts (the Big 5 I call them). It is recommended yearly for all women under the age of 25. Of note, recent laboratory advances for identification of STD's from the vaginal walls has allowed the development of **self-swabbing** (as supposed to the physician or nurse doing it).

The pap test is to search for abnormal cells in the cervix before they become cancer. In this way, the lesion can be treated at a very early stage. It is now required only every 3 years, starting at the age of 25 up to 69 years. Occasionally it may need repeat after 6 months or 1 year (if there is a mild abnormality).



**3. BIMANUAL EXAMINATION.** This involves palpating the internal organs such as the uterus and the ovaries. One or two fingers are inserted into the vagina, and the other hand will press on the lower abdomen. The purpose is to check the size, shape and position of the uterus, swelling or tenderness in the ovaries or tubes, trying to determine if there is an infection, a tumor or cysts. This procedure should not be painful, or only cause mild discomfort or pressure. In selected cases, a pelvic ultrasound may also be required, usually an internal or vaginal one.



Other exams may be necessary as well, such as examination of the thyroid, breasts, abdomen, skin, blood pressure and pulse, weight and height (and BMI). We'll explain if any of these are necessary, and the reasons for it.

*Dr Roberto Leon*