

# Dilatation and Curettage

## What is it?

A Dilatation and Curettage (D&C) is an operation performed on women to scrape away the lining of the uterus. It is also called a curette. It is a day-surgery procedure usually done under a general anaesthetic.

A D&C is sometimes done to assess potential cancer or infertility. It is also done to treat a range of conditions including incomplete miscarriage, polyps, uterine infection, endometriosis or heavy bleeding after childbirth.

## What do I need to do to prepare?

You will need to arrange for someone to take you home because you will not be able to drive for 24 hours after the operation.

You will need to fast for the procedure.

- Do not eat anything (including lollies, chewing gum or vitamins) for 6 hours before your appointment
- You can drink one small glass of water an hour but must stop 2 hours before your appointment
- You can take your regular medication. If you are on blood thinners or medication for diabetes, tell the clinic when you make your booking

It is helpful to:

- Bring all the scans and reports that your GP gave you to the appointment
- Wear two-piece clothing such as a top and skirt or loose-fitting pants. Also bring extra underwear

## What will happen?

You will be asked to change into a surgical gown (the sort that is open at the back). A drip will be put in your arm. This is used to give you the anaesthetic and sometimes anti-biotics.

You will be given a general anaesthetic. This puts you to sleep. You won't feel anything and will wake up after the procedure is finished. There are some health risks with this option. The anaesthetist will talk to you about these.

Some women choose to only have a local anaesthetic. This means you are alert the whole time but can't feel anything in your cervix or uterus. However, getting the local anaesthetic can be painful

The walls of your vagina are held apart by a speculum. This is the same instrument used by your GP when you have a cervical screening test. A rod is inserted into the cervix to gently widen or dilate the cervix. This is repeated with rods that increase in size until the 'os' is the right diameter. The os is the opening of the cervix.

A spoon-shaped instrument called a curette is used to scrape away the lining of the uterus. The lining is called the endometrium. If any tissue samples need to be collected, this will happen now.

Most women who have a D&C can go home four to six hours after the procedure. However, if you are having a D&C because of a miscarriage and you bled heavily before the operation, you may need to stay in overnight.

## When should I be concerned?



*Seek urgent medical advice from your doctor or emergency department if you have any of the following:*

- *Fever (temperature more than 38 degrees) or chills*
- *Vaginal discharge or a foul-smelling odour from the vagina*
- *Passing blood clots (bigger than 50 cent piece) or pieces of pregnancy tissue*
- *Heavy blood loss (having to change your sanitary pad every 20 minutes or less)*
- *Cramping in the abdominal region*

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## What can I expect after?

It is normal to have some mild cramping and light bleeding after a D&C. You can use over the counter pain medication to manage any pain from the cramping.

Infections occur in 2 percent of cases. To reduce your risk of infection, take any anti-biotic medication the clinic prescribes as instructed. For the first two weeks after the termination, you should also:

- Have nothing in your vagin, this means not having sex or using tampons
- Avoid baths or swimming (showers are fine)
- Avoid excessive or strenuous exercise

You will need to have a check-up two weeks after the procedure. This may with your GP.

Your uterus must build a new lining after a D&C, so your next period may not come on time. If you had a D&C because of a miscarriage, and you want to become pregnant, talk with your doctor about when it's safe to start trying again.

## Where can I learn more?

- **Better Health Channel** - dilatation and curettage: [betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://betterhealth.vic.gov.au)
- **HealthDirect** - dilatation and curettage: [healthdirect.gov.au](http://healthdirect.gov.au)
- **Healthy Western Australia** - dilatation and curettage: [healthywa.wa.gov.au](http://healthywa.wa.gov.au)

This information is to be viewed by someone who has received a diagnosis from their doctor. It is not designed to be used to diagnose a condition or as a substitute for ongoing medical care

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