

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid **Seat belts save over 11,000 lives each year in the U.S.**
(National Highway Traffic and Safety Administration, 2006)

Q. How often should a woman see a gynecologist?

A. Good question; however, there is not a “one size fits all” answer because female sexual health involves many factors. Some of the factors include age, past and current health issues, number of sexual partners, method of birth control, and any history of sexually transmitted disease and pregnancy. Most medical providers (and health organizations) recommend that young women have a health exam by a gynecologist or nurse practitioner every year, particularly between the ages of 18-30 years.

Gynecological exams usually include an internal and external pelvic exam (including a Pap test) plus examination of the thyroid gland and breasts. In a Pap test, the cells of the cervix (opening to the uterus) are collected and checked for abnormalities and infection. This screening test can detect early changes which might indicate the presence of Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) or cervical cancer. Because cervical cancer can be detected early, and often treated successfully, many of the protocols focus on the importance of the Pap test.

The American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG) recommends that Pap tests be started within three years of a woman having vaginal intercourse, or at least by age 21 (whichever comes first). According to ACOG, Pap tests should be done annually until age 30. After 30, if a healthy woman has had three completely normal and satisfactory Pap tests, she may be able to increase the test interval to every two to three years (but she should still see a gynecologist every year for an exam).

The American Cancer Society concurs with ACOG recommendations. They add that certain women should be screened every year due to increased health risks: those “exposed to diethylstilbestrol (DES) exposure before birth, women with HIV infection, or a weakened immune system due to organ transplant, chemotherapy, or chronic steroid use.”

The UA Campus Health Service Women's Health Clinic provides annual exams, STD testing, birth control, the morning after pill, and more. Call 621-9202 for an appointment. If you have a question or concern, call 621-7617, to speak to a nurse.

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu



SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, M.A., CHES, Melissa McGee, Ph.D., MPH & David Salafsky, MPH, health educators at The University of Arizona Campus Health Service.