

DILATION AND CURETTAGE/HYSTEROSCOPY

Dilation and curettage (D&C) is an outpatient procedure during which your doctor will enlarge the opening of the uterus (womb) so that a surgical instrument, called a curette, can be inserted to scrape out the lining of the uterus. Hysteroscopy is the direct visualization of the uterine cavity with lighting and magnification through a long, pencil-sized “telescope” inserted in the cavity of the uterus. D&C, with or without laparoscopy, can be performed for a variety of symptoms, such as abnormal uterine bleeding, postmenopausal bleeding, and irregularity in ultrasound or x-ray of the uterus. Often this is done to aid in the diagnosis of infertility or when cancer of the uterine lining is suspected.

The menstrual cycle is designed to prepare a healthy endometrial lining for a fertilized egg to grow in. Once a month, if a woman does not become pregnant, the “old” lining is shed through the cervical canal with the menstrual period and replaced with “new” lining in preparation for pregnancy. This cycle is repeated throughout a woman’s lifetime until her ovaries no longer make enough of the hormones needed to continue a regular, monthly cycle. Alterations in this cycle and irregularities of the lining of the uterus can lead to episodes of vaginal bleeding that are unpredictable, heavy, or cause significant discomfort.

For women in their teens, 20s, and 30s, irregular bleeding is most often the result of either pregnancy or an egg not being released during their menstrual cycles (anovulation). As women enter their 40s and 50s, ovulation becomes less regular and may lead to abnormal patterns of uterine bleeding. Another cause of women in their 40s and 50s is thickening of the uterine lining. In the women who has stopped menstruating, or reached menopause, a common cause for uterine bleeding is hormone therapy.

Irregular uterine bleeding and bleeding during menopause are often signs of uterine cancer. Because uterine cancer is more common in older women than in younger women, it is important that the cause of bleeding is investigated and treated. Cancers of the uterus, when discovered early in their development, can be cured.

Abnormalities in the shape of the uterine cavity can lead to a variety of symptoms including abnormal bleeding, repetitive pregnancy loss, inability to conceive, and others. Abnormal separations (septations), fibroid tumors (benign tumors), endometrial polyps, and scarring are only some of the causes of abnormalities in the shape of the uterine cavity.

There are a variety of procedures to collect endometrial tissue from the lining of the uterus. Some are designed to be performed in your doctor’s office (endometrial sampling) with very little advance preparation or discomfort. Dilation and curettage (D&C) is a procedure that removes a larger sample of the uterine lining and is typically performed in an outpatient setting or surgery center. Dilation and curettage, when combined with hysteroscopy, allows your doctor to see most abnormalities present, and

many times, and opportunity to correct them. The type of procedure recommended will depend on your symptoms, age, results of other testing, and the preference of your doctor. The pros and cons of each will already have been discussed with you in your consultation.