Cervical Ectropion

What is it?
To understand this you need to understand the anatomy of the cervix. The cervix is the medical term for the ‘neck of the womb.’ There are two types of cells found here:
- flat cells (squamous cells) cover the outer part of the cervix
- tall cells (columnar cells) line the inside of the cervix.

Where these two types of cell meet at the cervical opening (or ‘os’), is an area called the squamo-columnar junction (SCJ.)

At birth, the SCJ is positioned at or within the cervical os but as you age, and especially after puberty the increased amount of female hormone (oestrogen) causes the volume of the uterus (the womb) to increase. As this happens, the rim of the cervix rolls outwards, causing more of the columnar cells to be visible on the cervix. This is similar to what happens if you roll out your lips and inside of your mouth is then visible to the outside world. It is called an ectropion. When the doctor or nurse looks at your cervix they will see a bright red ‘polo mint’ appearance.

Is it serious?
No. It may cause you no problems at all, and often requires no treatment. It is not associated with cervical cancer.

What symptoms can it cause?
It may cause abnormal or copious amounts of vaginal discharge. Sometimes it may be associated with bleeding in between periods or after sexual intercourse. If you have abnormal vaginal bleeding you should always see a doctor as soon as possible for this to be checked out.

Can it be treated?
Yes. If it needs treatment, the usual treatment is to freeze or diathermy the area. This is usually done in specialised gynaecology clinics such as Colposcopy clinic where the cervix can be carefully assessed before any treatment is undertaken. It is also necessary to ensure that you have had a normal smear within the recommended time (usually 3 years) and negative swabs to rule out any infection. You will not require any anaesthesia for the procedure as you should only experience mild discomfort. You may notice a watery brownish discharge for two to four weeks after treatment.

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