

# Family planning clinics are for men, too...



What happens when a man – age 13, 25, 31, or 44 – goes to a family planning clinic for the first time? Here's what to expect.

Doing something for the first time can be stressful. If you're visiting a family planning clinic for the first time, here's some information to ease you into it. Before you even get there, you can let the person making your appointment know if you would prefer to see a male clinician.

## **Serious confidentiality**

First of all, a word about privacy. Everything you tell the clinic staff is private; nothing you say will be shared with anyone outside of the clinic. The clinic staff will also keep confidentiality if they need to contact you later for a follow up. When they call the phone number you provide, they will only talk to you unless you specifically say it's okay for them to talk to someone else. At your request, they can even use plain envelope when they write to you.

## **When you arrive at the clinic**

First, you'll check in at the front desk. If you called to make an appointment, the folks at the desk may be the same people you spoke to on the phone. You'll be asked your name, and you may be given some forms to fill out. Next, you'll go to the clinic waiting room.

The folks at the desk may ask if you have health insurance. You don't need insurance to be seen at a Title X funded family planning clinic! If you do have insurance, it may pay for your visit. You should bring your insurance card to the clinic with you.

Some clinics can see you for a check-up or other services without an appointment, and you can walk in any time for information.

## **Who will you talk to? What will happen?**

Every clinic has a different system to see patients. You may see a counselor first, or a lab technician, or a clinician.

A counselor will ask you why you came to the clinic today. You or the counselor will complete the medical forms needed for your visit. Your medical history is the biggest part of the forms. Your medical history information includes:

- Any health issues in your family
- Information about your health. Have you been sick? Have you been to the hospital?
- Your birth date and a phone number or address where the staff can reach you.

Let the counselor know if you have any problems or concerns. Maybe you have questions about:

- pain during sex,
- discharge from your penis,
- changes in your body, or what's normal.

The counselor will probably also talk to you about birth control methods and condoms. The counselor may ask:

- if you need condoms,
- if you or your partner are currently using birth control,
- if you would like to further information about using condoms.

You may also talk about:

- General health concerns
- Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
- Emergency contraception for a female partner
- HIV
- Abstinence
- Any incidents of violence

You may see a lab technician next. The lab tech will collect some basic health information from you by:

- checking your vital signs, like blood pressure and weight,

- testing a urine sample for signs of diabetes, chlamydia and gonorrhea,
- taking a finger prick blood sample to check for syphilis and your blood's iron level..

### **Who does the exam? What is the exam like?**

A trained medical professional, known as a clinician, does the exam. A clinician can be a doctor, a nurse practitioner, a physician's assistant, or a nurse midwife.

You may be asked to wait a moment in an exam room by one of the clinic staff. At some point in the exam, you will be asked to undress. At some clinics, they may ask you to take everything off and give you a medical gown to put on. At other clinics, they may ask you to take everything off from the waist down, and cover up with a paper sheet. You can sit on the exam table and relax while you wait.

The clinician will review your medical history and ask some more questions. It's important to answer the questions truthfully. The questions may seem personal, but they help the staff take care of you, and your answers won't leave the exam room.

### **A Basic Exam**

It's okay for you to ask the clinician questions! As the clinician does your exam, he or she should explain what is happening. The exam should not hurt. Definitely tell the clinician if some aspect of the exam hurts – it could be a sign of a problem.

**Step 1:** The clinician may check your eyes, nose and throat to make sure everything is clear and looks healthy.

**Step 2:** The clinician may listen to your chest and back with a stethoscope. The clinician is listening to hear if your heart is beating like it should and your lungs sound clear.

**Step 3:** If you have not undressed before, you will be asked to now. The clinician will look at your penis and testicles. Why?

- To check for any sign of cancer by gently touching your testicles. These signs include hard bumps or lumps, or having one testicle significantly larger than the other. (Don't worry if your testes are a little different in size – most men's are.)

- To check for a hernia. That's what's happening when the clinician asks you to "turn your head and cough." A hernia is an opening in the muscles of your abdomen. Hernias are uncomfortable, and most people can feel when they have one. For the exam, the clinician places a finger against the top of the scrotum. If you have a hernia, when you cough, it will press against the clinician's finger.
- To check for signs of a sexually transmitted infection (STI). Some STIs cause sores or warts that are easy to see; some can only be detected by a test.

It's possible to have an STI and not know it. If an infection is left untreated, it can cause damage. For example, chlamydia can spread from the urethra to the testicles and cause sterility. Don't assume you're getting tested for STIs; ask your clinician to do it.

Some clinics test for the STIs gonorrhea and chlamydia by inserting a thin swab into the urethra. Some clinics can test for these STIs by using a sample of your urine. If you want to have the urine test, try to avoid peeing in the 2 hours before your appointment. That way, the test will be more accurate.

### **You made it through the exam... What next?**

You'll have time to get dressed by yourself. Then the clinician will come back in and talk over the exam with you. Clinicians are an excellent source of information. If you have concerns about your body, sex, birth control, or anything else, take this opportunity to ask!

If you have an infection, you will get a prescription or medicine to treat it. The clinician will also let you know if you need to come back to the clinic or if they'll call you with results. It's easy to make a follow-up appointment on your way out.

This information was compiled by the Male Contraception Coalition from the Family Planning Council's "Men's Health: Visiting a Clinic" and Planned Parenthood's "What to Expect at Your Physical Exam: For Guys."