

Tips for Talking to Women Who Are Hesitant to Attend Follow-Up After an Abnormal Screening

WIPE OUT
cervical cancer
ALABAMA



OPERATION WIPE OUT Champions

Below are some suggestions on talking points when sharing information and/or educating others.

1 Start with Reassurance, Not Alarm

Hearing "abnormal" can feel scary — your tone matters.

- "An abnormal result **doesn't mean you have cancer**. It just means your doctor saw some changes that need a closer look."
- "Most abnormal results are caused by treatable changes. That's why follow-up is so important. It's how we stop cancer before it starts."



2 Acknowledge and Normalize Their Emotions

Many women feel fear, shame, or denial.

- "You're not the only one who feels nervous. That's completely normal."
- "A lot of women avoid follow-up because they're scared, but the best way to stay healthy is to take the next step."

3 Explain What Follow-Up Really Means

Break down what they can expect in plain language.

- "Follow-up might be a second Pap test, an HPV test, or a colposcopy, which is just a close-up look at your cervix with a special light. It's quick and usually done in the clinic."

Clarify that most follow-up appointments:

- Do not mean you have to have surgery
- Do not mean you have cancer
- Are important to **prevent cancer later**



4 Frame It as a Powerful Act of Self-Care

Help her feel **in control**, not helpless.

- *“Following up is a strong thing to do. It means you’re taking charge of your health.”*
- *“You have the chance to stop something early. That’s powerful.”*

This framing helps shift the mindset from fear to empowerment.

5 Address Barriers Openly and Offer Solutions

Ask gently:

- *“What’s making it hard to go back for follow-up?”*

Once you know the barrier, offer practical support if possible:

- **Cost?** – *“Many places offer sliding scale or free care — let’s check.”*
- **Transportation?** – *“Some clinics have vans or rideshare programs.”*
- **Time/childcare?** – *“Some clinics offer weekend hours. We can look together.”*

6 Use Stories or Testimonials When Appropriate

Hearing about another woman’s experience can be very persuasive.

- *“One woman I spoke to was scared, but she followed up and they found something early that was easy to treat. She was so relieved.”*

Make the outcome feel real and hopeful.

7 Avoid Guilt — Use Encouragement

Avoid saying: “You have to go.” Instead say:

- *“You deserve to know what’s going on and have the best chance at staying well.”*
- *“Whenever you’re ready, I’m here to help you figure it out.”*



Additional Quick Tips

Concern	How You Can Respond
“I’m scared it’s cancer.”	<i>“That’s understandable. But most abnormal results are not cancer. They’re early changes that can be treated easily if caught in time.”</i>
“I don’t have insurance.”	<i>“Let’s check – many clinics, including the health department, offer free follow-up through a special program.”</i>
“I don’t have time.”	<i>“You’re busy, but your health matters. Some clinics have extended hours. Let’s look together.”</i>
“I’d rather not know.”	<i>“That’s a common feeling but knowing gives you options and peace of mind. Ignoring it doesn’t make it go away.”</i>

DISCLAIMER: The purpose of these tips is to facilitate conversations based on our experience in Alabama as well as recent scientific literature. It is not encompassing of all concerns **OPERATION WIPE OUT** champions and partners will face in the community.

For more information and resources go to www.operationwipeout.org and/or reach out to **OPERATION WIPE OUT** coordinating partners.

