BASIC INFORMATION

DEFINITION
A dilatation and curettage is a minor surgical procedure that involves opening the cervix and removing the lining (endometrium) and contents of the uterus. The D & C is often both a diagnostic and a therapeutic procedure.

REASONS FOR PROCEDURE
- Diagnosis of abnormal bleeding or possible cancer inside the uterus.
- To help evaluate some cases of infertility, or inability to have children.
- Incomplete spontaneous miscarriage.
- Treatment of minor diseases of the uterus.
- Elective abortion during early pregnancy.
- Removal of membranes and placenta after childbirth in cases where they fail to deliver spontaneously.
- Removal of an IUD (intrauterine device).

RISK INCREASES WITH
- Obesity; smoking.
- Cervical infection or ongoing uterine infection.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Recent or chronic illness, including anemia, diabetes mellitus, and heart or lung disease.
- Use of drugs, such as antihypertensives, cortisone, diuretics, or insulin.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURE
- It is normally performed in a hospital or a surgery center. It is often an outpatient procedure.
- The patient is placed on the operating table with feet in stirrups.
- A general anesthetic, local anesthetic, or both will be administered. No cutting or stitches are needed.
- The vagina is cleaned with an antiseptic solution.
- A speculum is inserted into your vagina and then a special clamp called a tenaculum is used to grip the cervix.
- The cervix is carefully opened with dilators. The smallest dilator is used first. The next larger sizes continue to be inserted until the opening is increased to the desired size.
- A curette (scraper) is then inserted into the uterus. The curette can be a suction device or a looped knife. The curette is used to scrape the endometrium from the uterine wall. Tissue may be removed for examination and diagnosis, or for treatment of heavy or irregular uterine bleeding.
- Sometimes a hysteroscope (a video camera on a tube with lenses) is used within the uterus to evaluate the lining.
- Occasionally, ultrasound can be used for guidance of the instruments.
- The instruments are removed.

EXPECTED OUTCOME
- Tissue obtained successfully without complications in virtually all cases.
- If the D & C was performed to stop heavy bleeding or remove residual tissue following a miscarriage or abortion, or to remove polyps, no further testing or treatment may be necessary.
- If the laboratory studies indicate cancer, your health care provider will discuss treatment options.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS
- Surgical-wound infection.
- Excessive bleeding.
- Inadvertent injury to the uterus.
- Complication of the anesthetic used.

POSTPROCEDURE CARE

GENERAL MEASURES
- Most women go home shortly after having a D & C (usually the same day).
- You may experience some lower abdominal pain (similar to menstrual cramps) for several days after a D & C.
- Wear cotton underpants and pantyhose with a cotton crotch. Avoid underpants made from nylon, polyester, silk or other nonventilating materials. Don't douche.
- Expect slight vaginal bleeding during recovery from surgery. Use a sanitary pad to protect clothing. Avoid tampons temporarily; they may lead to infection.
- The next menstrual cycle may not be regular. It could be late or early.
- For more information, check the library or the internet.

MEDICATION
- Antibiotics are often given during, or following, the procedure to help prevent any infections.
- Prescription pain medication should generally only be required for 2 to 7 days following the procedure.
- You may use nonprescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, or ibuprofen for discomfort or minor pain.

ACTIVITY
- Resume driving after 24 hours.
- Resume daily activities, including work, as soon as you are able; within hours or one or two days.
- Resume sexual relations when spotting ceases.

DIET
No special diet.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF
Any of the following occurs:
- Vaginal discharge increases or smells unpleasant.
- You experience pain that simple pain medication does not relieve quickly.
- Unusual vaginal swelling or bleeding develops.
- You develop signs of infection: general ill feeling and fever, headache, muscle aches or dizziness.