

Bartholin's cyst or abscess

This leaflet aims to help women with a cyst or abscess of the Bartholin's gland to gain an understanding of the condition and the various treatments available. If there is anything you do not understand or if you have any questions, please ask the clinic nurse or telephone us on 0118 322 7181.

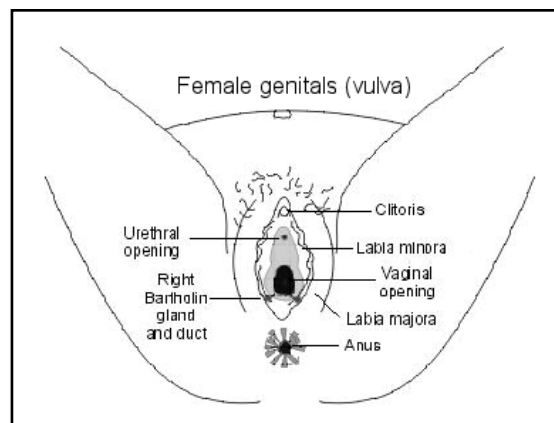
What is the Bartholin's gland?

The Bartholin glands are located on both sides of the vaginal opening. Under normal conditions, they are not noticeable. Their job is to secrete a fluid (through a duct) that keeps the vagina moist.

What is a Bartholin's cyst?

A cyst forms when the ducts leading to the gland become blocked. The reason it occurs is not clear and there is little you can do to prevent it.

If the cyst is left untreated, it may become infected and result in an abscess which contains pus (a thick fluid). The skin around the abscess can become red, hot, swollen and unbearably tender. Bartholin's cysts or abscesses can vary a lot in size (from the size of pea, right up to the size of a golf-ball or larger).



What is the treatment for the cyst or abscess?

If you have a small cyst that causes no symptoms and does not develop into an abscess, then it does not usually require treatment. If an abscess forms, then it will almost always need treatment. Treatment will either be a course of antibiotics, or an operation to drain the abscess.

Antibiotics: A course of antibiotics has a good chance of curing an infected gland or abscess. However, as a rule, the more pus that forms, the larger the abscess and the less chance that antibiotics alone will be sufficient to clear the abscess without also needing to drain the pus.

Surgery: The main aim of the operation is to drain any fluid or pus. This relieves symptoms, reduces the chance of cyst or abscess coming back. The operation is called a marsupialisation, and is carried out under either a local anaesthetic (you are awake but the area is numbed) or a general anaesthetic (you are asleep). A course of antibiotics may be prescribed if pus is drained from an abscess. However, antibiotics are not always needed once the pus has been drained. Your doctor will discuss your most appropriate treatment option with you and will explain any benefits and risks.

How successful is surgery for treating a Bartholin's cyst or abscess?

Surgery is usually successful, and the likelihood of a recurrent Bartholin's cyst is low. There is a risk of the wound getting infected after the surgery, but this is only a problem in a small number of cases following marsupialisation.

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What alternative treatments are available?

- Some people recommend that sitting in a warm bath for 10-20 minutes, three or four times a day, may encourage a Bartholin's cyst to burst naturally. It is not clear how well this may work. However, it is always best to see a doctor if you think an abscess is developing.
- Sometimes, the entire gland is removed by a surgical operation. This is considered a 'last resort' but may be advised if you have several recurrences of a Bartholin's cyst or abscess.

What to expect after surgical treatment

If you do decide to go ahead with surgery, drainage of a Bartholin's abscess is quite a small operation. However, as it is a very sensitive area of the body, you will be given the following advice:

- You will need to rest for a couple of days after you leave hospital.
- You can bathe or shower but avoid bubble bath, oils or talcum powder while the wound is healing.
- Avoid sexual intercourse until there is no discharge and you are pain free.
- Take painkillers if you need them, following dosage advice on the packet.
- Avoid tight fitting clothes, e.g. jeans or underwear, until you are pain free.

If you have any concerns or questions, please call the Emergency Gynaecology clinic where staff will be happy to help you.

Further information

NHS Website www.nhs.uk/conditions/Bartholins-cyst

If, after you have gone home, you have any questions or concerns, please call the Emergency Gynaecology Clinic where the staff will be happy to help you.

Emergency Gynaecology Clinic Telephone Number: **0118 322 7181 / 8204** (this number is available 24/7).

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

S Philip (Consultant Obstetrician), October 2015

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