



Saint Mary's Managed Clinical Service
Division of Gynaecology

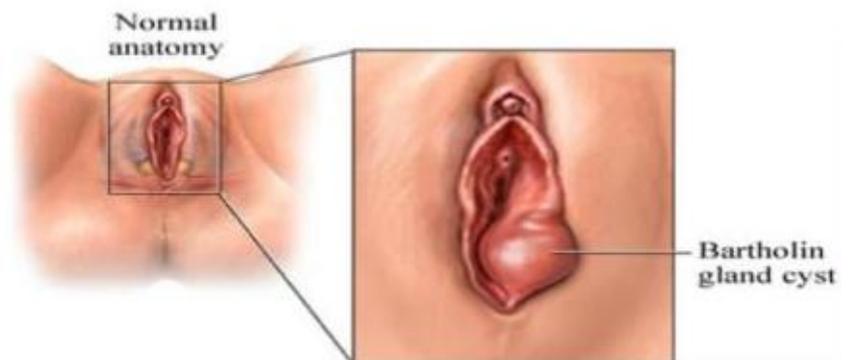
PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

BARTHOLIN'S CYST/ABSCESS

This leaflet aims to give you some general information about Bartholin's abscess and help to answer any questions you may have. It is intended only as a guide and there will be an opportunity for you to talk to your nurse and doctor about your care and treatment.

BARTHOLIN'S ABSCESS

Bartholin's glands are a pair of small glands that are next to the lower part of the entrance to the vagina. Each gland is about the size of a pea. Unless infected, you cannot normally see or feel these glands as they are within the soft tissues (labia) next to the entrance to the vagina. Each gland produces a small amount of mucus-like fluid which helps to keep the entrance to the vagina moist. An abscess can occur if the gland or cyst becomes infected.



Several different types of bacteria can cause an infection that blocks the duct. Some types of bacteria can be passed on through sexual contact while others are found in the environment.

Bacteria that may cause a Bartholin's Abscess include:

- **Gonococcus:** Usually responsible for gonorrhoea (a sexually transmitted infection) and may be responsible for around 1/3.
- **Chlamydia trachomatis:** Usually responsible for chlamydia (a sexually transmitted infection).
- **Escherichia coli:** Often responsible for food poisoning.
- **Streptococcus pneumoniae:** Responsible for pneumococcal infections, such as infections of the inner ear or sinuses.
- **Haemophilus influenza:** Responsible for several infections such as epiglottitis, an infection of the epiglottis (the flap of tissue at the back of your throat).

Therefore, we suggest that all individuals who have had a Bartholin's abscess, should consider having a check for sexually transmitted infections once the abscess has got better at a genitourinary medicine clinic.

SYMPTOMS

Bartholin's cysts can remain small and painless and may not cause any symptoms. However, if it becomes infected and an abscess develops symptoms may include:

- Tenderness and pain on either side of the vagina.
- Discomfort caused by any pressure on the area such as walking or sitting.
- Fever.
- Pain or discomfort during intercourse

Bartholin's cyst, although rare can be a sign of vulval cancer. This is a type of cancer that affects the vulva (a woman's external sexual organs). Occasionally, vulval cancer can affect the Bartholin's glands (the two glands either side of the vagina) and a growth or cyst may appear. Vulval cancer is a relatively rare form of cancer, with about 1,000 cases diagnosed in the UK each year. There are several different types of vulval cancer and, depending on the stage of the condition when it is diagnosed, the outlook can be good. Visit your GP immediately if you notice any changes to your vagina, such as pain or itching.

TREATMENT

There are three treatment options currently available. If the cyst becomes an abscess, you may be prescribed antibiotics to clear the infection

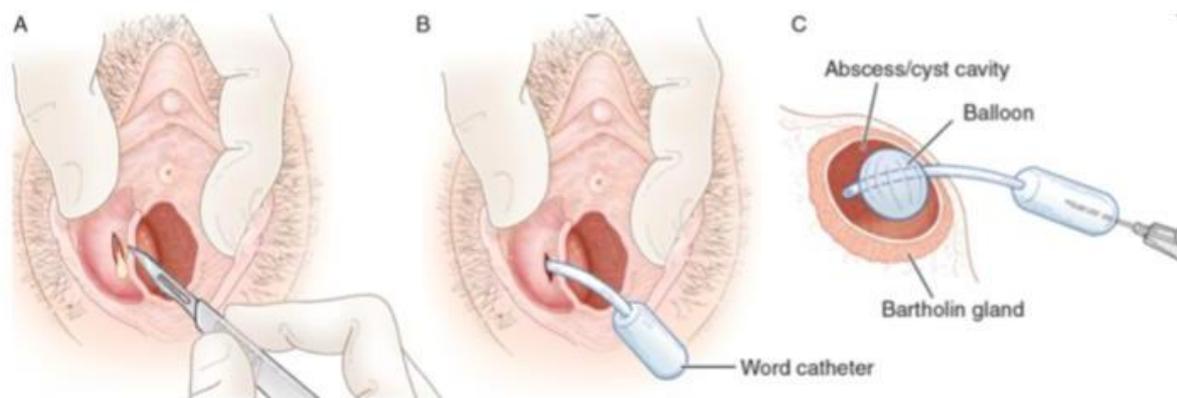
CONSERVATIVE MANAGEMENT

This is particularly appropriate for:

- Small cysts /abscess causing minimal discomfort
- Abscesses already discharging spontaneously
- No definite fluctuant mass suitable for drainage
- Resolving abscesses surrounded by induration only

Recommendations include analgesia, warm baths and massage of the Bartholin's abscess to encourage spontaneous discharge of collection.

INFLATABLE BALLOON CATHETER INSERTION



Insertion of an inflatable balloon is a non-surgical procedure that can be performed as an outpatient, with a local anaesthetic to numb the area. It involves making a passage from the cyst or abscess through which the gland can drain.

The patient is given a local anaesthetic. A cut is made into the cyst or abscess, which is then drained. A tissue sample may also be taken to check for an infection or tumour at this stage. A flexible tube (called a catheter) with a small specially designed balloon at its tip, is inserted into the cyst or abscess to create a passage. The balloon is inflated with liquid to keep it in position. It is then left in place for up to 4 weeks to allow new skin to form around the

passage and for the wound to heal. The balloon is then deflated and removed allowing the gland to drain through the newly formed passage.

Advantages and Disadvantages

The advantages of this procedure are that the woman does not need to be admitted to hospital and avoids having a general anaesthetic. She can take up normal activities again once she is comfortable. This includes exercise and sex.

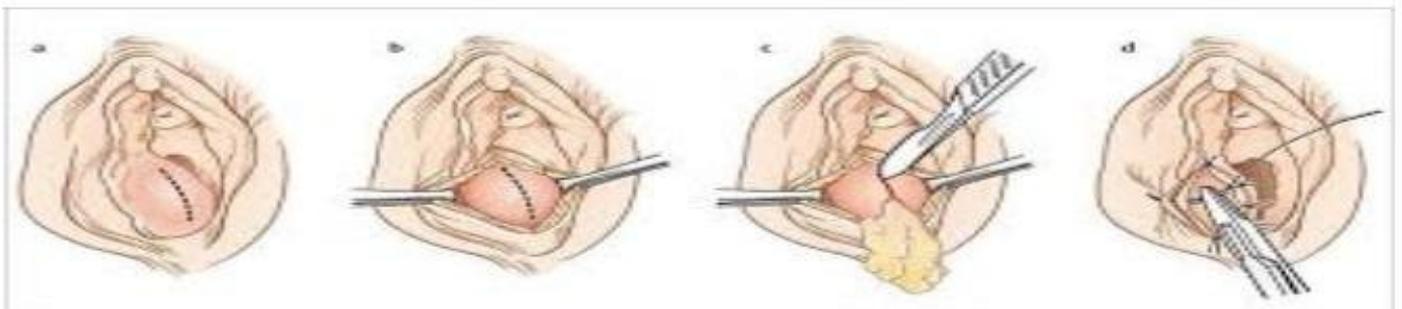
Possible problems may include pain if the balloon is too full, which could be relieved by letting out some of the liquid. Occasionally the doctor will find that the abscess appears unusual or complex and therefore surgery is needed under general anaesthetic to treat the cyst or abscess properly.

Follow up

After inserting a balloon catheter, the doctor or nurse will make a further appointment to see the patient again after 4 weeks, to remove it. However, if the catheter is painful, then the woman should return so that she can be examined and a small amount of to the fluid in the balloon may be removed.

Occasionally the catheter will fall out before the 4 weeks period is up. If this occurs in the first 5 days, the doctor will try and reinsert it. If it is more than 5 days, then the doctor would be likely to suggest seeing what happens without reinsertion. In this instance, a further catheter would only be inserted if the abscess builds up again.

MARSUPIALISATION



Marsupialization is performed under general anaesthesia; the cyst is opened with an incision (cut) and the fluid is drained out. The edges of the skin are then stitched back together in a way that allows any further fluid build-up to continue to drain out.

REOCCURANCE

Bartholin's abscesses can occur again, whatever treatment is used (the long-term recurrence rate is about 1 in 5 (20%). With this inflatable balloon technique, the studies show a rate of 4-17% recurrences over 4 years.

AFTERCARE

Following your procedure, a course of antibiotics may be prescribed, however they are not always needed. You may experience discomfort and stinging at the operation site. Warm

baths may lessen these symptoms along with simple painkillers that you can buy over the counter. You may experience some discharge from the incision site, this is normal and can last for a few days. A bath or shower is advised once or twice daily to aid the healing process. It is generally advised to avoid intercourse until the area is healed and no longer painful.

PREVENTION

A number of bacteria can cause a Bartholin's cyst and you may not be able to avoid being exposed to all of them. Some of these bacteria are also responsible for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia. You can protect yourself against these infections by practicing safer sex. If you are sexually active, having safe sex gives you and your partner the best protection against STIs.

If you require any further information or clarification, including clarification of terminology, please do not hesitate to talk to one of the doctors or nurses, who will be happy to discuss your concerns with you.

CONTACT DETAILS

If you have any queries or concerns, please contact our Emergency Gynaecology Services for advice:

 **Emergency Gynaecology Unit (EGU)**
(0161) 291 2561 (24 hours)

The EGU is located at Wythenshawe Hospital (enter via entrance 15)

The department operates a telephone triage service; you must call and speak with a specially trained nurse before attending to plan your care

 **Gynaecology Ward F16 at Wythenshawe**
(0161) 291 5060 (24 hours)

 **Gynaecology Assessment Unit (GAU)**
(0161) 720 2010 / (0161) 604 5130

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday & Friday: 07:30 – 20:30 Saturday & Sunday - 08:30 – 16:30

GAU is located at North Manchester Hospital (Ward G2, via Entrance 1 / main entrance). To be seen in GAU a referral from your GP, Midwife, A&E or other health care professional is required. GAU is not a self-referral unit

There are no Emergency Gynae or early pregnancy services at Saint Mary's Hospital, Oxford Road.