

Bartholin's Gland Cyst

Introduction

The Bartholin's gland is a tiny organ one on each side of the labia (vaginal lips), near the opening of the vagina. They are normally invisible, and they make a small amount of fluid, which lubricates the vaginal lips. If a flap of skin or mucus plug develops over the opening of one of the glands, the fluid backs up, and causes a round swelling called a cyst.

What is a Bartholin's gland cyst?

Most of the time, Bartholin's gland cysts are simple cysts. They may however become infected. Most infected cysts (called abscesses) contain bacteria (or germs) that are found on the skin. Some infected cysts can be caused by sexually transmitted bacteria.

How will I know if I have a Bartholin's gland cyst?

You may notice a round, painless or slightly tender bulge towards the back of one of the vaginal lips just next to the entrance of the vagina. It may stay the same size or grow slightly larger. Cysts can get infected and are usually very tender. In extreme cases, walking may be painful. Your doctor will look at the area to see if you have a cyst and to find out if it is infected.

Treatment

Treatment depends on the size of the cyst, how painful it is and if it is infected. You may require a small surgical procedure under general anaesthesia. This involves making a small cut into the cyst to drain the fluid. The gland is then repaired in such a way to form into a pouch; this is called marsupialization. A dressing will be put over the wound, and sometimes a length of dressing is packed inside the opened pouch to help healing. Antibiotics are given if there is any infection. You may be able to have the operation on the day you come in and go home the same day.

After the operation

You may have a slight discharge for a few weeks; panty liners should be all you need to take care of this discharge. Any packing you have will be taken out after 24 hours or so. The vulva will feel a little painful for a few days and you will be given painkillers to help relieve this. You can wash the area as soon as you wish; soap and tap water are entirely adequate; salted water is not necessary. Take shallow baths three times a day to keep the vulva clean and to help healing. You may resume sexual relationship when you feel comfortable, usually after a week or two.

What are the possible risks or complications of the operation?

In general, all operations carry some degree of risks to your general health. The operation for Bartholin's gland cyst or abscess is not regarded as a major surgical procedure but it does carry a very small chance of complications, estimated to be less than 1%.

Every effort is made to reduce the occurrence of complications but we do need your cooperation in following the instructions that you are given. The following list is a summary of the more common possible risks and complications that may arise as a result of the procedure.

The list is not intended to make you feel anxious about the operation but to provide details so that you can make an informed decision regarding the operation. As mentioned earlier, the chance of complications is very small indeed.

- **Risks associated with general anaesthesia**

General anaesthesia is usually very safe. Problems however may arise very rarely as a result of anaesthesia. Your anaesthetist will see you before the operation to discuss your anaesthetic and to answer any questions you may have. This is also your opportunity to discuss the best way to control any pain or discomfort you may have after your operation.

- **Risk of bleeding**

There will be a small amount of bleeding, which is associated with most operations. Very rarely, there may be unusually prominent blood vessels which may cause excessive bleeding. It is very unlikely that you will require a blood transfusion.

- **Risk of wound infection**

One of the purposes of the operation is to remove the cyst to avoid potential infection from occurring. In the case of an abscess, infection is already present, and may persist. Antibiotic treatment is usually given to prevent spreading of the infection.

- **Risk to nearby tissues**

This is unlikely, but scarring of the surrounding area may occur.

Will the cyst come back?

Bartholin's gland cysts rarely come back after treatment. Sometimes the cyst will come back years later; it can be treated again. Very occasionally, the Bartholin's glands may become infected again. If this happens please inform your doctor right away so that you can get early and effective treatment.

Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the Patient Experience Team – Tel: (01323) 417400 Ext: 5860 or by email at: esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net

Hand hygiene

The Trust is committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

Other formats

If you require any of the Trust leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department.

Tel: 01424 755255 Ext: 2620

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse or doctor.

Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

David Chui and Dexter Pascall Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist

The directorate group that have agreed this patient information leaflet:

Guideline Implementation Group

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