

Harbourside gynaecology

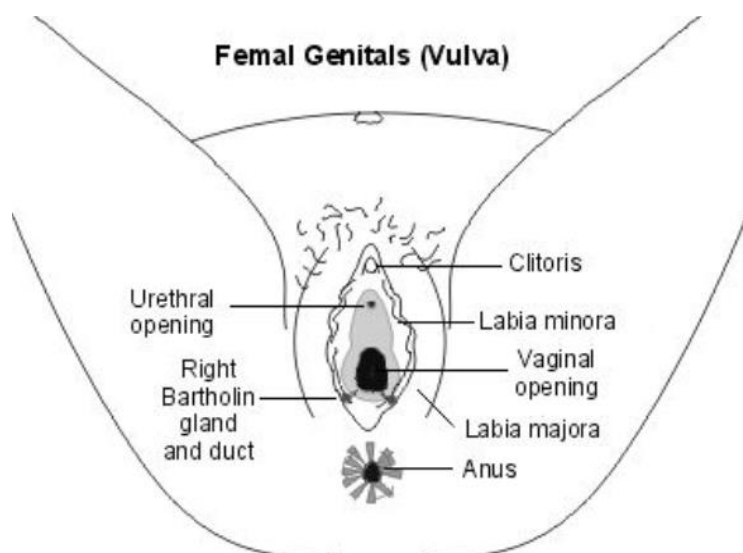
Patient information

Bartholin's cyst/abscess and inflatable balloon insertion for treatment

What is Bartholin's cyst or abscess?

Bartholin's glands are two pea size glands, which lie next to the entrance to the vagina. Unless they are diseased or infected, you cannot normally see or feel these glands. During sexual arousal they produce lubrication that enters the vagina through a small duct (tube) from each gland.

About 3 in 100 women will develop a fluid-filled swelling (Bartholin's cyst) or a collection of pus (Bartholin's abscess) at some point in their life.



What are the symptoms of Bartholin's cysts and abscesses?

A Bartholin's cyst or abscess typically only develops on one of the two glands. If a cyst remains small and does not become infected then you may have no symptoms. You may just feel a small lump to one side at the lower end of the entrance to the vagina, which may cause no problems. However, a larger cyst may cause some discomfort - in particular, when walking, sitting, or having sex. Very large cysts can become quite painful.

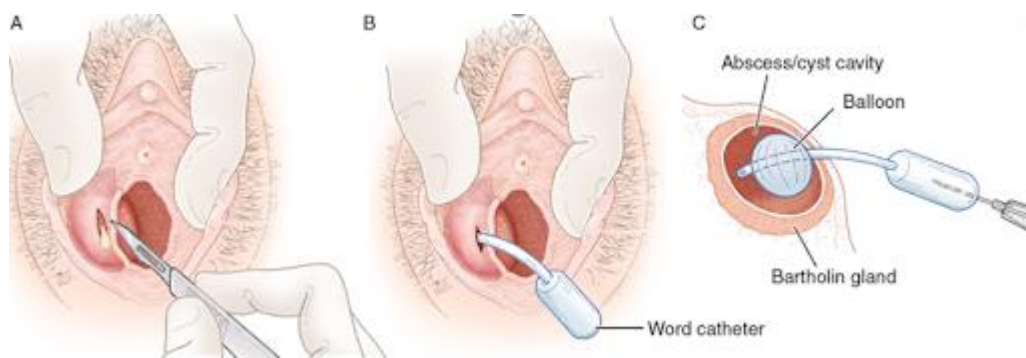
With an abscess, a lump develops and quickly gets bigger, typically over a few hours or days. It is likely to become very painful. You may feel unwell and have a high temperature and the skin over the abscess tends to become red, hot and very tender. You may also have a discharge.

What is the treatment for Bartholin's cyst or abscess?

If a cyst causes symptoms usually warm bath or compresses and simple pain killers will help to relieve the symptoms. A collection of pus, confirmed as a Bartholin's abscess, will almost always need treatment as it can be very painful. Antibiotics may help in early stages but a small operation is needed in many cases. Bartholin's cyst or abscess can be drained and a new duct opening created (Marsupialisation) either under a general anaesthetic or with a simpler procedure under a local anaesthetic.

Treating with inflatable balloon- what does the procedure involve and how does the balloon work?

Insertion of an inflatable balloon is a minor surgical procedure that can be performed as an outpatient by a doctor. It involves first giving a local anaesthetic around the cyst or abscess. A cut is made into the cyst or abscess, which is then drained. A flexible tube (called a catheter) is inserted into the cyst or abscess. The tip of the catheter has a tiny balloon which is inflated to keep the catheter in place for 2-4 weeks. A stitch may be used to partly close the cut and help hold the balloon in position. The aim is to keep the opening from closing up. As the tissues heal, it allows the formation of a new tube (duct) over the catheter.



While the catheter is in place you can go about your normal activities. Most people are not aware of the catheter within and it will be removed when you attend for review in 2-4 weeks - removal is painless. On some occasions the balloon may fall out on its own and if it falls out within the first few days, please make sure you contact us.

After the balloon is deflated and removed, it will allow the gland to drain through the newly formed passage.

How well does the balloon work?

The balloon generally works well. Various studies have shown overall good success rates, with one study showing 97% success with no recurrence at six months. Another study showed recurrence in 17% of patients, needing repeat procedure over a mean period of nine months. 89% of women who retained the catheter for four weeks said they would recommend the procedure to a friend.

Are there any risks associated with this procedure?

The procedure is safe with minimal risks. Studies have reported 14% of patients complaining of mild pain, which could be relieved by deflating the balloon slightly. The other possible problems include expulsion of the bulb or catheter, infection, abscess recurrence, bleeding, scarring and discomfort during sex. Simple analgesia and/or two to three warm baths each day is advised in order to provide comfort and promote healing.

Will it happen again?

Bartholin's is a fluid-filled swelling (cyst) or collection of pus (abscess) and can happen again (recur) after treatment and in some cases treatment needs to be repeated.

Can Bartholin's cysts or abscesses be prevented?

Not usually. Most occur 'out of the blue' for no apparent reason. Some Bartholin's abscesses are due to sexually transmitted infections and so using a condom when having sex may prevent some cases

Consent

We must, by law, obtain your written consent to this procedure before carrying it out. Staff will explain all the risks, benefits and alternatives before asking you to sign a consent form. If you are unsure about any aspect of the treatment proposed, please do not hesitate to speak with a senior member of staff.

Contact details

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Monday –Friday and for non-urgent inquiries there is an answerphone out of hours.

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