

Bartholin's Gland Cyst

What is a Bartholin's gland cyst?

A Bartholin's gland cyst is a fluid-filled swelling of a Bartholin's gland. Bartholin's glands are two small glands on each side of the opening of the vagina (birth canal). These glands are called Bartholin's glands. They each have a small duct (tube) that opens to the outside. The glands produce a fluid that helps protect the tissues around the vagina and provides lubrication during sexual intercourse. Normally these glands cannot be felt or seen.

How does it occur?

A cyst may develop when the duct of one of the glands becomes swollen and blocked. Injury, irritation, or infection may cause a buildup of fluid and swelling that blocks the duct.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms are:

- swelling
- tenderness
- sometimes pain.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider will ask about your symptoms and will see a swollen area at the opening of the vagina. The swelling will be diagnosed as a cyst if it is not painful. If it is painful and infected, it is called a Bartholin's gland abscess.

How is it treated?

Sometimes the cyst will go away if you put warm, moist cloths (compresses) on it or sit in warm baths. The moist heat can help unblock the opening so that the fluid can drain out. Nonprescription medicine such as aspirin, acetaminophen, or ibuprofen may help relieve the pain.

- Your health care provider may make a small cut over the gland, making an opening so fluid can drain out from the cyst. Your provider may then sew the opening in a way that leaves it open but helps prevent it from tearing and getting bigger. This is usually done with a local anesthetic so that you don't feel pain during the procedure. This treatment is called marsupialization.
- Your health care provider may make a tiny cut in the cyst and insert a catheter (a very small tube) into the cyst for a few weeks. The catheter helps form a passageway for fluid produced by the gland. Ask your health care provider about any precautions you should take while the catheter is in place. Your provider will remove the catheter in 4 to 6 weeks. The passageway should stay open after the catheter is removed, preventing another cyst.
- A cyst may become infected. It may form an abscess and become very painful. If a cyst is infected, your health care provider may drain it and prescribe an antibiotic.
- Sometimes the whole gland needs to be surgically removed, especially if the cyst often comes back. The Bartholin's gland can be removed without damage to that area of the vaginal opening. You can have sexual intercourse without the gland.

How can I help take care of myself?

Follow your health care provider's instructions. Call your health care provider if you have any of these signs of infection:

- redness around the cyst
- fever
- pain
- more swelling.

How long will the effects last?

- With the treatment of warm compresses, the cyst may go away in 3 to 5 days. Sometimes the cyst does not go away with this treatment.
- The cyst usually goes away almost immediately after your health care provider makes an incision for drainage.
- A cyst may recur over and over again if the whole gland is not removed.

How can I help prevent a Bartholin's gland cyst?

- Make sure you keep the area of the vagina clean with mild soap and warm water.
- Avoid hard or deep rubbing in the area around the opening of the vagina.
- If you take long bike rides or ride horses a lot, try to protect your genital area by cushioning it with soft padding.

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