

Study Material- Bartholin Cyst

Bartholin's abscess can occur when one of the Bartholin's glands, located on either side of the vaginal opening, develop an infection. When the gland is blocked, a cyst will usually form. If the cyst becomes infected, it can lead to a Bartholin's abscess.

A Bartholin's abscess can be more than an inch in diameter. It usually causes significant pain. While most people with a Bartholin's abscess completely recover, in some cases the cyst will return and become infected again. Women of childbearing age are the most affected population. Nearly 2 percent of women will experience a Bartholin's abscess in their lifetime.

What causes a Bartholin's abscess

There are two Bartholin's glands, each about the size of a pea. The glands sit on either side of the opening of the vagina. They provide lubrication to the vaginal mucosa.

Doctors believe that bacteria, such as E. coli, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), such as chlamydia or gonorrhea, may cause the infections that can lead to a Bartholin's abscess. If bacteria get into the gland, swelling, infection, and an obstruction may occur.

When fluid builds up in the gland, pressure increases on the area. It may take years for fluid to build up enough to form a cyst, but an abscess can form quickly after.

If the infection and swelling advance, the gland may abscess, which breaks open the skin. A Bartholin's abscess tends to be very painful. It usually only occurs on one side of the vagina at a time.

What are the symptoms?

A Bartholin's abscess usually causes a lump to form under the skin on one side of the vagina. A Bartholin's abscess will often cause pain during any activity that puts pressure on the area, such as walking, sitting down, or having sexual intercourse.

A fever may also accompany the abscess. The area of the abscess will likely be red, swollen, and warm to the touch.

How is a Bartholin's abscess diagnosed?

To determine if you have a Bartholin's abscess, your doctor will perform a physical exam. They will check for any lumps within the vagina that could indicate an abscess. They may also take a sample from the area to check for any STDs. STDs will need to be treated along with the abscess.

If you're over the age of 40 or have already gone through menopause, your doctor may want to perform a biopsy on any masses found in the vagina to rule out other potential conditions. In rare cases, a Bartholin's abscess can indicate cancer.

Home treatment options for a Bartholin's abscess

In its early stages, a Bartholin's abscess can sometimes be treated at home using a sitz bath. A sitz bath is a warm, shallow bath you can give yourself in your bathtub or with a sitz bath kit. Soaking may not cure the abscess, but it can help ease your pain and discomfort.

To treat a Bartholin's cyst, which can lead to an abscess, the Mayo Clinic recommends soaking in three or four sitz baths a day, for at least 10 to 15 minutes each.

It may take many days of sitz baths to treat an abscess because the opening of the Bartholin's gland is very small, and it may close before drainage is complete.

Other home treatments for cyst care may help the abscess drain and heal on its own. Using a mix of tea tree and castor oil as a topical ointment on the abscess may promote drainage. Tea tree oil is known for its antibacterial properties, which may help clear an infection. Castor oil is thought to promote blood circulation in the affected area, which can reduce inflammation.

You can apply the tea tree and castor oil with a piece of gauze. Adding a hot compress on top of the gauze may make this remedy even more effective.

When to see your doctor

If you think you may have a Bartholin's abscess, see your doctor. You can try sitz baths and cyst care at home, but the condition is unlikely to go away without medical treatment.

Typically, the abscess needs to be drained through surgery. In most cases, you can have this procedure at your doctor's office under local anesthesia. General anesthesia in a hospital is also an option. Talk to your doctor about the best choice for you.

During the surgery, your doctor will make an incision in the abscess and place a catheter inside to drain the fluid. The catheter may remain in place for several weeks. Once the abscess heals, your doctor will remove the catheter or allow it to fall out on its own.

Since the abscess is likely the result of an infection, your doctor may prescribe antibiotics. However, antibiotics may not be necessary if the abscess drains properly.

It's common for Bartholin's abscesses to recur. If, after your treatment, the Bartholin's abscess comes back repeatedly, your doctor may suggest a procedure called marsupialization.

Marsupialization is a surgery that's similar to the other drainage procedure. But instead of allowing the incision to close, your doctor will stitch the incision open to allow for maximum drainage. They may use a catheter or pack the abscess with a special type of gauze that they will then remove the next day. Local anesthesia is an option during a marsupialization. The procedure can also be performed under general anesthesia. Your doctor will treat any infection present with antibiotics before the surgery.

If these treatments don't stop the Bartholin's abscess from recurring, your doctor may recommend having your Bartholin's glands removed. This surgery is rare and requires general anesthesia in a hospital setting.

How can it be prevented?

By good hygiene.