Outpatient management of Bartholin’s abscess or cyst with Word catheter

Gynaecology

Introduction

We have given you this leaflet because you have been diagnosed with a Bartholin’s cyst or abscess and need treatment. This leaflet includes details on what a Bartholin’s cyst and abscess are, what the various treatments involve and the possible risks of having treatment. We hope it will help to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to a member of our team.

What is a Bartholin’s gland?

The Bartholin’s glands are located on both sides of the vaginal opening. Under normal conditions, they are not noticeable. These glands secrete a fluid (through tiny openings called ducts) that keeps the vagina moist.

What is a Bartholin’s cyst or abscess?

A cyst forms when the ducts leading to the gland become blocked. The reason this occurs is not clear but it may be due to infection. There is little you can do to prevent it. If the duct becomes blocked, the gland becomes bigger as fluid secreted by the gland becomes trapped inside and you will become aware of a lump inside the vagina. This may become infected. If this happens, the skin around it may become red, hot, swollen and unbearably tender.

This may progress, over time, if not treated, to form an abscess - a collection of pus (thick creamy fluid) within the Bartholin's gland. The gland may pop and ooze with pus, or it might not. You may find it difficult to walk and you may be unable to sit down. You may also be reluctant to pass urine or have sexual intercourse.

What is the treatment for the cyst or abscess?

If you have a small cyst that causes no symptoms and does not develop into an abscess, then it may be best to simply leave it alone.

If an abscess forms, it will almost always need treatment. Treatment will be a course of antibiotics or if necessary, an operation to drain the abscess.

Antibiotics:

A course of antibiotics has a good chance of curing an infected gland or abscess. However, as a rule, the more pus that forms and the larger the abscess, the less chance that antibiotics alone will be sufficient to clear the abscess and surgery may be required.

The prevention of infection is a major priority in all healthcare and everyone has a part to play.

- Please decontaminate your hands frequently for 20 seconds using soap and water or alcohol gel if available
- If you have symptoms of diarrhoea and/or vomiting, cough or other respiratory symptoms, a temperature or any loss of taste or smell please do not visit the hospital or any other care facility and seek advice from 111
- Keep the environment clean and tidy
- Let’s work together to keep infections out of our hospitals and care homes.
Surgery:
• Incision and drainage - the main aim of the operation is to drain any fluid or pus. This relieves the symptoms and may also minimise the chance of the problem recurring. A simple incision and drainage can be performed but this has a higher recurrence rate. A separate leaflet is available for this procedure.
• Marsupialisation - an artificial draining channel or pouch can be made using a process called marsupialisation after the abscess has been drained (the opening or pouch is left for any fluid to drain out thereby reducing the chance or re-occurrence). This is carried out under general anaesthetic (you are put to sleep). A separate leaflet is available for this procedure.
• Word catheter - the procedure may also be performed under a local anaesthetic (you are awake and the area is numbed) using the word catheter and this is described below. A course of antibiotics may be prescribed if pus has been drained.

What happens about gaining my consent for this procedure?
We must seek your consent for any procedure or treatment beforehand. Your doctor will explain the risks, benefits and alternatives where relevant before they ask for your consent. If you are unsure about any aspect of the procedure or treatment proposed please do not hesitate to ask for more information. The choice about which treatment is best for you will be made together with your doctor. This will be based on the risks and benefits and individual circumstances.

What are the benefits of a Word balloon catheter insertion?
The benefits of this procedure include:
• Avoiding having a general anaesthetic and its associated risks
• Avoiding nausea and vomiting after an anaesthetic
• A shorter hospital stay
• Less interference with your normal day-to-day activities
• No need for an escort home from hospital
• No need to avoid eating before the procedure
• It can be performed as an emergency to relieve symptoms without waiting for a theatre space

What are the risks associated with a Word balloon catheter insertion?
There are risks associated with any procedure. Please ask us any questions if you are uncertain.
The most common risks or complications from this procedure are:
• Infection
• Bleeding
• Incomplete drainage – sometimes the balloon may be too full and may cause some pain, therefore, we may need to deflate it slightly
• Re-occurrence (occurring again) – approximately 1 in 10 women.

Are there any other alternative treatments?
Some people recommend that sitting in a warm bath for 10 - 20 minutes, three to four times a day, may encourage the Bartholin’s cyst to burst naturally. It is not clear how well this may work. However, it is always best to see your doctor if you think an abscess is developing.

Sometimes, the entire gland is removed by surgical operation. This is considered a last resort but may be advised if you have several recurrences of the Bartholin’s cyst or abscess.
How is a Word catheter used?
An alternative treatment for Bartholin’s abscess involves putting local anaesthetic over the area of the enlarged gland to numb it so it is not painful. A small cut is made in the inner portion of the vagina. This allows the fluid or abscess to be drained out. The doctor may flush the cavity with some sterile fluid.

Thereafter, the word catheter - a small rubber tube- is put in through the opening that has been created. The plastic tubing has a little balloon at the tip and this is filled with about 3mls of sterile fluid. The balloon helps to keep the tube in place. The lower end of the tube is tucked into the vagina. The tube is left in place for a few weeks.

During this time, the tube leads to the formation of a new draining tube (duct) through which the gland can still drain once the word catheter is removed.

Most women find the procedure acceptable and you can still be able to carry on with your normal activities afterwards.

The word catheter should not interfere with intercourse although we will suggest using sanitary pads instead of tampons if your period starts during treatment to reduce the risk of infection.

The procedure will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

How successful is surgery for treating a Bartholin’s cyst or abscess?
Surgery is usually successful. In a few cases, the problem may reoccur despite having this treatment. The Word catheter treatment has a higher success rate when compared to a simple cut (incision and drainage) to drain a Bartholin’s cyst or abscess because it creates a new duct (channel) for the gland to drain thereby reducing the chance of the problem reoccurring in the future. As with all operations, there is a small chance of problems arising, for example, infection of the wound occurs in a small number of cases following treatment.

How should I prepare for the procedure?
You can eat and drink normally before your procedure. You should take pain relief, such as paracetamol or ibuprofen (if you are not allergic), approximately one hour before your appointment. This will help with any discomfort or pain you might experience during or after the procedure.

When can I leave hospital?
If you have the insertion in our gynaecology assessment unit (GAU), we will offer you a drink and time to rest after the procedure. We recommend that you stay for about half an hour or until you feel well enough to go home. You can return to your normal activities as soon as you feel comfortable to , including driving.

What medicines will I need to take following the procedure?
You may require a course of oral antibiotics. We will give you these before you leave hospital. Please make sure that you complete the entire course of antibiotics that we prescribe you.

Please let us know if you have allergies to any medicines.
What should I expect after the operation?
As the procedure involves a very sensitive area of the body, be aware of the following:

• We place 3mls of fluid in the tube and most women are comfortable with this. If you experience worsening pain, you should attend the emergency department and we may discuss the option of removing a small amount of fluid from the word catheter
• You will need to rest for a couple of days after you leave hospital
• You can bath or shower but avoid bubble bath, oils or talcum powder while the wound is healing
• Avoid sexual intercourse until there is no discharge and you are pain-free
• Take pain-killers if you need them, following the dosage advice on the packet
• Avoid tight-fitting clothes, for example, jeans or tight underwear until pain-free
• We will inform you on when to return to have the word catheter removed.

What should I do if the Word catheter falls out?
Should the catheter fall out on its own, do not be alarmed. This is usually a sign that a new duct (channel) has formed which is the aim of the procedure.

Please contact us so we cancel your follow-up appointment to remove the catheter on the phone number on our leaflet below or any other contact you have been provided.

Emergency Gynaecology Assessment Unit
01902 694606 Monday – Friday 08:30 - 17:00

If you have any concerns or questions, please contact your GP.

Where can I get more information?
NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions/Bartholins-cyst
NICE: www.nice.org.uk
English

If you need information in another way like easy read or a different language please let us know.

If you need an interpreter or assistance please let us know.

Lithuanian

Jeigu norėtumėte, kad informacija jums būtų pateikta kitu būdu, pavyzdžiui, supaprastinta forma ar kita kalba, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Jeigu jums reikia vertėjo ar kitos pagalbos, prašome mums apie tai pranešti.

Polish

Jeżeli chcieliby Państwo otrzymać te informacje w innej postaci, na przykład w wersji łatwej do czytania lub w innym języku, prosimy powiedzieć nam o tym.

Prosimy poinformować nas również, jeżeli potrzebowaliby Państwo usługi tłumaczenia ustnego lub innej pomocy.

Punjabi

ਨੇ ਉੱਤਰਾਂਤਾ ਹਿੰਦੀ ਨਾਚਕੜੀ ਵਿਭਾਗ ਤੇ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਹਾਪਿਆ ਦੂਪ ਨਾਂ ਵਿਨੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਹਿੰਦੂ, ਹੰਨੀ ਹੇ ਉੰ ਵਿਚ ਬਲੈਵਨਾ ਮਾਂਡੂ ਦੰਗਆ।

ਨੇ ਉੱਤਰਾਂਤਾ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਹਾਲੀ ਦੀ ਨਾਂ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਹਿੰਦੂ ਦੀ ਸੇਟ ਦੇ ਉੰ ਵਿਚ ਬਲੈਵਨਾ ਮਾਂਡੂ ਦੰਗਆ।

Romanian

Dacă aveți nevoie de informații în alt format, ca de exemplu caractere ușor de citit sau altă limbă, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Dacă aveți nevoie de un interpret sau de asistență, vă rugăm să ne informați.

Traditional Chinese

如果您需要以其他方式了解信息，如易读或其他语种，请告诉我们。

如果您需要口译人员或帮助，请告诉我们。