



A guide to...

Inserting a Word catheter to treat a Bartholin's cyst or abscess

Patient Information

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Introduction

The Bartholin's glands are a pair of pea-sized glands that are found just inside the opening of the vagina. Each gland produces mucus that provides vulval and vaginal lubrication.

The glands have tiny tubes and ducts which can become blocked causing the gland to become full of mucus. This then becomes a cyst. If the cyst becomes infected it is then known as an abscess and can be very painful.

Symptoms

Most cysts do not cause any symptoms, and are usually found during a routine smear or examination. However, if a cyst grows very large, it may become noticeable and can feel uncomfortable when walking, sitting or during sexual intercourse.

Sometimes the cyst can affect the labia majora (the fleshy area around the opening of the vagina), usually on one side, making the area look swollen or bigger than usual.

If an abscess develops it is usually red, very painful and tender to touch. It may also cause a fever.

What is a Word catheter insertion?

This is a small procedure that involves draining the abscess using a small rubber tube called a Word catheter. First, local anaesthetic is injected to numb the area and to relieve some of the discomfort.

A small cut is made into the swelling to drain the abscess and the catheter is then inserted into the gland and held in place by a tiny, water-filled balloon for up to four weeks. Rarely a stitch may be used to help hold the balloon in place.

What are the benefits of having this procedure?

- No need to be admitted into the hospital, in and out in a short period of time
- Avoids the need for general anaesthetic
- It has a good success rate of 97%
- After the procedure, you may return to work and continue with normal day-to-day activities as soon you feel able.

Are there any risks involved?

As with any surgical procedure, there is a small chance of complications. These include:

- Bleeding from the surgical area. This is usually minimal and does not last for long
- Pain; sometimes this can be relieved by letting out some of the water in the balloon. We will keep you comfortable during the procedure with pain relief
- Occasionally the doctor will find that the abscess appears unusual or complex and to treat it properly may need surgery under general anaesthetic
- Bartholin's abscesses can occur again, regardless of the method of treatment (the long-term recurrence rate is about 1 in 5).

After care

Initially you will have discharge from the catheter. You should wear a sanitary pad to absorb the discharge. Do not use tampons until the area has healed. Avoid sexual intercourse and tight clothes while the Word catheter is still in place.

Follow up

If the balloon catheter has not fallen out four weeks after insertion, we will make an appointment to remove it.

If the catheter is painful during that time, you should return so that you can be examined, and a small amount of the fluid may be removed from the balloon.

Are there any alternative treatment options?

Antibiotics are used to treat a very small abscess.

Surgical treatment under a general anaesthetic, which would drain the abscess or make an opening that allows the gland to drain freely

Contact Details

For further information contact our staff:

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Author	Gynaecology Department
Ratified / Review Date	July 2022 / July 2025
ID Number	28/2023/V2

