

Bartholin's Cyst

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Introduction: A Bartholin's cyst is a fluid mass resulting from blockage of the ducts which deliver fluids from the Bartholin's gland to the vagina.

A **Bartholin's cyst** is a mass of fluids and sometimes pus located just outside the vagina. Fluid travels from the Bartholin's glands to the vulva via small ducts. When these ducts become obstructed a cyst can form. These cysts can become infected and form into an abscess.

Causes: Bartholin's cysts are caused by a clog in the small tubes which deliver vaginal fluid.

Bartholin's cysts are caused by obstruction of vaginal fluid. Bacterial infection or a mucous buildup is understood to be the main cause of this blockage. The Bartholin's glands are located behind the vulvar lips. They produce the fluid which the body needs to keep the vagina clean in general and also lubricated during sexual activity. Normally, this fluid travels to the vagina via ducts, or small tubes reaching from the glands to the surface.

If these ducts are blocked or obstructed, fluid cannot drain and will build up into a cyst. Often the cyst will only occur on one side, although there are two glands located symmetrically behind the vulva. A number of bacteria strains have been associated with Bartholin's cysts:

- *Chlamydia trachomatis* is known as the cause of chlamydia.
- *Gonococcus* is the bacteria which causes gonorrhea.
- *Escherichia coli* (E. coli) is a common strain known for causing infectious diarrhea.
- *Streptococcus pneumoniae* typically infects the nose, throat and ears.
- *Haemophilus influenza* is known to cause throat infections.

Symptoms: Bartholin's cysts appear as a small mass at the entry to the vagina.

A Bartholin's cyst appears as a small lump or mass of tissue present near the lower part of the labia minora, the small lips outside of the vagina. This lump can be pea-sized or grow to be much larger. The cyst itself may tender or painful to touch. Walking and sitting may aggravate the cyst.

Diagnosis: The Bartholin's cyst, once spotted can be diagnosed by further examination.

A Bartholin's cyst may not be diagnosed until it becomes large enough to be visible. Once noticed, a swab of bacteria may be taken from the vagina. Growing the bacteria in a lab and examining it will allow the doctor to eliminate other diseases. A small cell sample called a biopsy may be taken and examined to rule out cancer.

Treatment: The cyst may be left alone or treated with soaking and a compress. If infected it may need medical intervention.

Often a Bartholin's cyst will clear up itself in minor cases. Relieving the pain can be accomplished with over the counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen or other NSAIDs. Soaking in a warm bath or applying a hot compress may relieve the cyst.

Fluid may be aspirated out of the cyst with a needle. A balloon catheter may be placed in temporarily to allow fluids to drain. In some cases, draining the cyst once is not effective enough. The cyst will persist or return if the duct is malfunctioning. If these tubes are deemed problematic, the physician may choose surgery. Stitches can be used to hold the duct open. This procedure is called "marsupialization". If the cyst becomes infected, the abscess will be treated with antibiotic drugs.