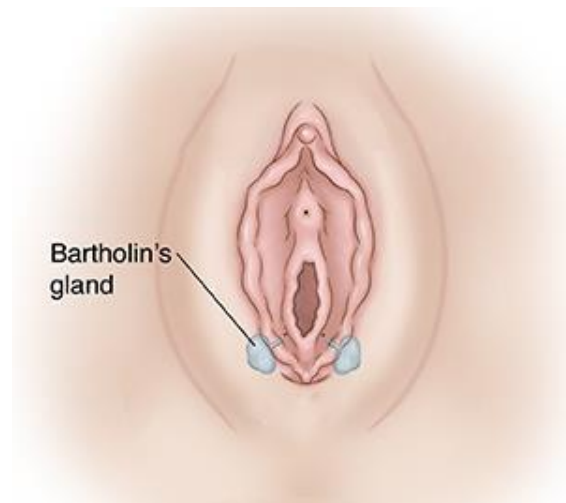


This article was requested from an unknown client:

In today's world, stress relief and mental health play a huge part in having healthy relationships. With illnesses, running around with the kids, and political drama, it's no wonder our personal lives are suffering. A key way to combat these uncertainties is to keep the focus on self-care, specifically sexual health. Sex releases chemicals that our brains need to keep us mentally stable. With having sex whether with partners or on your own, it is important to maintain your physical health to be able to enjoy all of the benefits. In this article specifically, we will be discussing the Bartholin glands in their entirety; from function to problems that can arise and everything in between.

What Are the Bartholin Glands?

The Bartholin glands, also known as the greater vestibular glands, are responsible for secreting mucus to lubricate the vagina. They are only present in females, however; males have equivalent glands known as the bulbourethral glands. Bartholin glands are located in the superficial perineal pouch on each side of the vagina and have ducts that open on the surface of the vulva. The glands produce fluid and mucus during sexual arousal to aid in more comfortable contact. This fluid is considered acidic and is high in potassium. The Bartholin glands can produce about six grams of fluid per day.



*Image shows where Bartholin glands are located

Bartholin cysts and Abscesses

When the opening of the duct becomes obstructed, fluid can back up into the Bartholin gland which forms a cyst. A Bartholin cyst is relatively painless and does not cause an abundance of swelling. However, if the fluid in the cyst becomes infected, a Bartholin abscess can form. When a cyst becomes an abscess, pain and swelling are more noticeable. Some symptoms can include painful walking or intercourse as well as fever. Sometimes the cyst or abscess may start draining on its own. A yellow-red discharge may be noticeable in underwear or on toilet paper. This discharge is a combination of blood and pus from the abscess. Normally, Bartholin cysts only affect one side of the body, however; there have been cases of both glands being affected more than once.

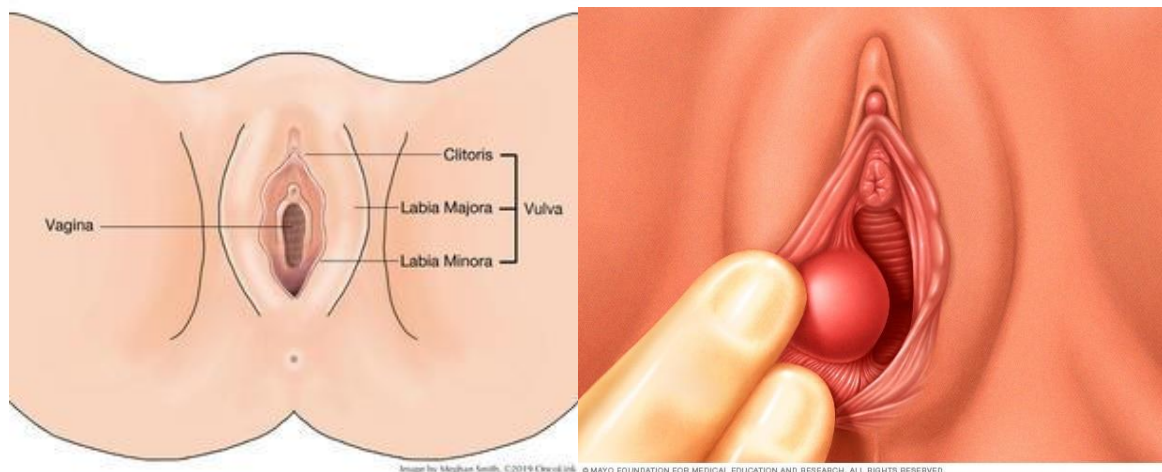
Causes Behind Bartholin Cysts

Bartholin cysts can be caused by certain bacteria, such as E. coli as well as bacteria from gonorrhea or chlamydia. They can also be caused by injury to the gland or to the duct. If you feel one of these issues could have caused a cyst, seek medical attention.

How to Treat: Do I Need to See a Doctor?

Depending on the severity of the cyst will determine the method of treatment needed. A very minor Bartholin cyst can end up going away on its own. For a more noticeable cyst, a warm bath can help alleviate the clogged duct and allow the Bartholin gland to drain. In the presence of an abscess, more in-depth treatment will need to be involved.

Some at-home remedies can be found online to help with the drainage of a Bartholin abscess. One of the top-rated treatments is a mix of liquid calamine, witch hazel, and a few drops of tea tree oil. Within a couple of hours, this mix causes the abscess to pop and relieves pain. Just dip a clean cloth in the mixture and place it on the outside of where the abscess is. Usually, they appear between the labia majora and the labia minora. Be sure to put pressure on the cyst area to aid in draining it completely. If fluid is left behind, the cyst can reform and turn back into an abscess.



*Image on left shows female anatomy. Image on right shows a Bartholin cyst.

In the event that at-home remedies do not pop or drain the abscess, medical intervention will need to be considered. A doctor can lance the duct and allow the Bartholin gland to drain. Antibiotics are also given to prevent further infection. If you are prone to Bartholin cysts, your doctor may consider removal of the gland completely through surgery. In some cases, even with removing the problematic gland, the opposite gland may become prone to cysts. If both glands require removal, a doctor can prescribe lubricants for sex.

Are Bartholin Cysts Preventable?

There is no true prevention for Bartholin cysts. Practicing safe sex by using condoms can help to reduce the occurrence. Using good hygiene measures after sex is key as well, such as washing the vaginal area

with a pH-balancing soap or wiping with a pH-balance cloth. Also, urinating after sex is a great way to help clean and sterilize the vaginal area.

Can Men Get Bartholin Cysts?

As stated above, the male equivalent to the Bartholin glands are the Bulbourethral glands, also known as the Cowper glands. Similar to women and Bartholin cysts, males can get clogged ducts leading to the Cowper glands. They are often observed in young males and corrected by medical intervention. There have been reported cases in adult males, however; these cases are rare.

Other Forms of Cysts

The female anatomy is complex and has various parts that can develop cysts. Some cysts are associated with age while others can be from trauma or injury. Any form of cyst should be evaluated by a medical professional as it could be a sign of cancer.

Some cysts are specifically on the outer area of the labia. One type, called Milia, are small white bumps around the outer labia and are usually found in older women. These bumps are technically cysts but do not cause any harm to the patient. Another type of cyst that forms on the labia majora is called an Epidermoid. They are found in elderly women and can be singular or have multiple. Epidermoid cysts are usually painless and small, however; large cysts have been reported near the vulval region.

While we know Bartholin cysts are internal, there are a few others that can be problematic. Vestibular mucinous cysts are very similar to Bartholin cysts except they form near the inner labia minora. They have similar symptoms to Bartholin cysts as well and require the same treatment.

Some cysts are developmental and happen in the womb. Gartner cysts, ciliated cysts of the vulva, and cysts of the canal of Nuck all occur during the development of a fetus. All of these cysts require medical treatment.

Precaution Is the Best Preventative

Physical health is an important topic and should be addressed often. Sexual health is a key part of physical and mental health and needs to be taken seriously. If ever you notice a cyst, abscess, or any concern about your sexual areas, seek medical advice immediately. While it may seem like a Bartholin cyst that may go away, it will be safer to get checked out and confirm the diagnosis.