Bartholin's Cyst or Abscess

Bartholin's glands are small glands located within the folds of skin (*labia*) along the sides of the lower opening of the vagina (*birth canal*). A cyst may develop when the duct of the gland becomes blocked. When this happens, fluid that accumulates within the cyst can become infected. This is known as an abscess. The Bartholin gland produces a mucus fluid to lubricate the outside of the vagina during sexual intercourse.

SYMPTOMS

- Patients with a small cyst may not have any symptoms.
- Mild discomfort to severe pain depending on the size of the cyst and if it is infected (abscess).
- Pain, redness and swelling around the lower opening of the vagina.
- Painful intercourse.
- Pressure in the perineal area.
- Swelling of the lips of the vagina (*labia*).
- The cyst or abscess can be on one side or both sides of the vagina.

DIAGNOSIS

- A large swelling is seen in the lower vagina area by your caregiver.
- Painful to touch.
- Redness and pain if it is an abscess.

TREATMENT

- Sometimes the cyst will go away on its own.
- Apply warm wet compresses to the area or take hot sitz baths several times a day.
- An incision to drain the cyst or abscess with local anesthesia.
- Culture the pus if it is an abscess.
- Antibiotic treatment if it is an abscess.
- Cut open the gland and suture the edges to make the opening of the gland bigger (*marsupialization*).
- Remove the whole gland if the cyst or abscess returns.

PREVENTION

- Practice good hygiene.
- Clean the vaginal area with a mild soap and soft cloth when bathing.
- Do not rub hard in the vaginal area when bathing.
- Protect the crotch area with a padded cushion if you take long bike rides or ride horses.
- Be sure you are well lubricated when you have sexual intercourse.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- If your cyst or abscess was opened, a small piece of gauze, or a drain, may have been placed in the wound to allow drainage. Do not remove this gauze or drain unless directed by your caregiver.
- Wear feminine pads, not tampons, as needed for any drainage or bleeding.
- If medications which kill germs (*antibiotics*) were prescribed, take them exactly as directed. Finish the entire course.
- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There is an increase in pain, redness, swelling, or drainage.
- You have bleeding from the wound that results in using more than the caregiver's suggested number of pads in 24 hours.
- Chills and/or an oral temperature above 100° F (37.8° C) develops, or as your caregiver suggests.

- You develop any new problems (*symptoms*) or aggravation of your existing condition.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

Document Released: 04/07/2004 Document Re-Released: 03/16/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.