

Women's Services Patient Information

Draining a Bartholin's abscess with a Word catheter

The aim of this information leaflet is to help answer some of the questions you may have about the treatment of a Bartholin's abscess. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak with your doctor or nurse.

What is a Bartholin's abscess?

Bartholin's abscesses are fluid filled lumps that occur when an opening of a gland in the vagina becomes blocked. Around 2% of women will have one in their lifetime.

How can they be treated?

Abscesses that are small or have started to leak fluid often only require antibiotics as treatment. However, if your abscess is larger or doesn't get better with antibiotics, you may need further treatment. One of the treatments that can be offered is a Word catheter insertion.

What is a Word catheter?

A Word catheter is a small tube that is inserted into the opening of the gland to create a new opening, allowing the fluid to drain away.

What does a Word Catheter insertion involve?

- Before having the treatment a doctor will explain the procedure and ask you to sign a consent form.
- The treatment involves making a passage/channel from the cyst or abscess through which the gland can drain. The whole procedure takes around 15 minutes. The area is cleaned and a local anaesthetic is given. A small cut is made in the area of the abscess and a small flexible tube (catheter) with a small balloon at its tip is inserted to create a passage. The balloon is then inflated with a liquid.
- You may feel some soreness after the procedure; we would recommend that you take your normal pain relief for this.

How long does the catheter stay in?

The catheter usually stays in for 4 weeks, until the abscess has healed. (If the catheter falls out before then; please contact Ward 12 on the number overleaf).

You will be seen 4 weeks after the catheter has been inserted. The abscess will be assessed and the catheter will be removed.

Will there be any discharge from the catheter?

A small amount of clear inoffensive discharge may continue to drain after the catheter is inserted.

Will it affect my life in any way?

You can shower or bathe as normal. You can use tampons or pads. It may be too sore to have sex initially, but once you feel comfortable you can.

Are there any risks involved?

Your doctor or nurse will explain these risks to you before you sign a consent form. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak with your doctor or nurse.

The success rate of the catheter is 97% but in 3% of cases the catheter may fail.

The most common risks or complications from this procedure include:

- local infection
- bleeding
- incomplete drainage – sometimes the balloon may be too full and may cause some pain so it may need to be deflated slightly
- discomfort and recurrence of the abscess – the risk is very low, four in 100 people experience a recurrence

What are the options if I do not want a Word Catheter?

Other treatment options will be discussed with you by a nurse or doctor and include draining the abscess under general anaesthetic.

Ward Contacts

You can contact staff on ward 12 on 01274 364380 if there are any complications or you need any advice. We use Next Generation Text for people with hearing difficulties. To contact us ring 18001 01274 364380.

If you need this information in another format or language, please ask a member of staff.

Smoking: Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust is a smoke-free organisation. You are not permitted to smoke or use e-cigarettes in any of the hospital buildings or grounds.

Wristbands: When you are in hospital it is essential to wear a wristband at all times to ensure your safety during your stay.

The wristband will contain accurate details about you on it including all of the essential information that staff need to identify you correctly and give you the right care. All hospital patients including babies, children and older people should wear the wristband at all times.

If you do not have a wristband whilst in hospital, then please ask a member of staff for one. If it comes off or is uncomfortable, ask a member of staff to replace it.