Bartholin Gland Disorders

The Bartholin glands are a paired gland located right at the vaginal opening. The ducts exit on the vestibule, the part of the vulva just adjacent to the vaginal opening. The glands secrete a fluid that aids in vaginal lubrication during sexual arousal. Most of the moistness with sexual arousal is actually from the vaginal skin itself and not solely from the Bartholin glands.

A number of conditions can affect the Bartholin glands. One or both of the glands can fill with fluid and form a cystic mass. A **Bartholin Cyst** is appreciated as a bulging mass at the vaginal opening that may be associated with symptoms of pain and pressure. Some women experience discomfort with sexual intercourse. Women relay symptoms of pain and pressure especially when the gland fills with fluid acutely. Draining the cyst is often necessary and relieves the symptoms. For women with chronic cyst formation, surgical treatment may be necessary.

The Bartholin glands can also become infected when the duct becomes plugged and bacteria are trapped in the gland. A **Bartholin Abscess** leads to an acute enlargement and inflammation of the gland and overlying skin. Most women experience a great deal of pain when this occurs and incision and drainage is often necessary. A small catheter may be placed in the infected gland cavity to allow it to continuously drain as the infection heals. Alternatively, the cavity may be packed with gauze. Antibiotics along with sitz baths are used when the infection is small. This conservative management may be successful therefore not necessitating incision and drainage of the gland. As with chronic cyst formation, the Bartholin glands can be subject to chronic infection. Surgical treatment may be necessary.