

# Ganglion cysts

## What are ganglion cysts (ganglion)?

Ganglion cysts are smooth lumps commonly found around the wrist and the hand. The most usual locations are on the back of the wrist joint, the palm side of the wrist, and the base of the finger within the palm. It is also possible to find them on the end joints of the fingers; these are known as mucous cysts.

The swelling is caused by a leakage of synovial fluid from the joint or tendon lining. Ganglia are filled with this clear fluid or gel; they may change in size or even disappear completely. They are benign and do not spread. Sometimes they cause mechanical symptoms or may be painful if they are close to a nerve.

## Treatment

Ganglia can be safely left untreated, especially if they are painless. If they are painful or limit movement it is possible to remove the ganglion surgically.

## What happens at surgery?

Surgery to remove the cyst is usually done as a day-case procedure under a general anaesthetic (being put to sleep) or a regional anaesthetic (having the whole arm numbed with anaesthetic injections but you remain awake). This is because the ganglion has a stalk (or root) into the joint which may be painful to remove under a local anaesthetic alone. A local anaesthesia may be used during surgery to remove a ganglion cyst around the finger.

After surgery your hand will be bandaged for two to three days, the dressings should then be reduced but the wound should remain covered and dry until removal of your stitches. Occasionally, a temporary half-plaster cast is used (backslab) to limit movement at the wrist for a week or two. You may need painkillers during this time. Simple painkillers (e.g. paracetamol and ibuprofen) are frequently needed, and your surgeon may also prescribe stronger pain relief for a few days (e.g. codeine phosphate). You will be advised by the staff about pain relief. Approximately 10-14 days following surgery, the dressings will be taken off and the stitches removed. This is usually done at your GP practice.

## What are the possible complications?

- It is possible to have further leakage of fluid causing a recurrence of the ganglion in 10-30% of cases; it is also possible to have a similar problem in a different area within the hand.
- Any ongoing pain usually indicates that the ganglion was not the source of the pain
- You may notice your grip strength is reduced.
- As with any surgical procedure there is a small risk of infection.
- Occasionally persistent swelling, joint stiffness and pain may occur.
- Scar tenderness is common, although this normally subsides by six weeks. Massage to the scar can be helpful to relieve these symptoms.



## PATIENT INFORMATION LEAFLET

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### **How long will I be off work and when can I drive?**

- Depending on the site of surgery you may find driving difficult during the first 2 weeks. You can drive after your stitches are removed and when you can make a full pain free fist.
- You should be able to return to work within a few weeks depending on the nature of your job.

### **Further Information**

Further information sheets will be available to you when you leave the hospital:

- Post-operative Hand and Arm instructions
- Care following a general anaesthetic

In the event of you experiencing any problems please do not hesitate to contact you consultant's secretary, the Day Surgery Unit or our GP.

For further information on your procedure please contact:

- the Day Surgery Unit on 024 7696 6861 or 024 7696 6868
- the Day Surgery Unit St Cross Hospital Rugby on 01788 663264

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format please contact 024 7696 6861 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

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### **Document History**

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Department	Orthopaedics
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