

Patient Information

Orthopaedics

Ganglion cysts



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What are ganglion cysts

Ganglion cysts are smooth lumps commonly found around the wrist and the hand. The most usual places to find them are:

- on the back of the wrist joint
- the palm side of the wrist
- the base of the finger within the palm

It's also possible to find them on the end joints of the fingers. These are known as mucous cysts.

The lumps are caused by a leakage of synovial fluid from the joint or tendon lining. Ganglia are filled with this clear fluid or gel.

Ganglia 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. Most do not require surgery and will resolve on their own. If they are painful or limit movement, it's possible to remove the ganglion surgically. Ganglia can come back in the future.

During surgery

Surgery to remove the cyst is usually performed as a day-case procedure under a regional anaesthetic. This is where your whole arm is numbed with anaesthetic injections, but you remain awake.

In certain circumstances, surgery is performed under general anaesthesia (being put to sleep).

A local anaesthetic may be used during surgery to remove a ganglion cyst around the finger. The finger is numbed with injections so you feel no pain during surgery, but you remain awake and can move your hand and arm.

After surgery

After surgery, your hand will be bandaged for 2 to 3 days. The dressings should then be reduced, but the wound should remain covered and dry until we remove your stitches. A temporary half-plaster cast (back-slab) is used sometimes to limit movement at the wrist for 1 to 2 weeks.

You may need painkillers after surgery. Simple painkillers, such as paracetamol and ibuprofen, are often needed. Your surgeon may prescribe stronger pain relief for a few days (codeine phosphate). You'll be advised by the staff about pain relief.

Between 10 to 14 days after surgery, the dressings will be taken off and the stitches removed. This is usually done at your GP practice. If a plaster was applied, this is removed in hospital.

Risks and complications

- It's possible to have leakage of fluid causing a recurrence of the ganglion in up to 3 in 10 of cases. It's 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. This usually goes away after 6 weeks. Massage to the scar can help to relieve these symptoms.

When you can drive

It's **your** responsibility to make sure you're safe to drive. Discuss this with your treating clinician if you are unsure.

Consider bringing someone with you to avoid driving home yourself immediately after the procedure.

Waiting until you can grip the steering wheel tightly without any distracting pain before resuming driving.

When you can return to work

Returning to work will depend on your type of job. Discuss this with your treating clinician if you are unsure.

You should be able to perform most everyday activities with any splints or strapping that may have been provided.

Do not resume sporting activities until you're told it's safe to do so.

More information

The Day Surgery unit can be contacted on 024 7696 6861 (University Hospital), or on 01788 663264 (Hospital of St. Cross).

Patient Information

For more information, please contact:

- Our plaster room technicians at Hospital of St. Cross on 01788 669 143
- Our plaster room technicians at University Hospital Coventry on 024 7696 6909
- Our specialist hand surgery nurse / hand-coordinator on 024 7696 5072
- Hand Therapy at University Hospital Coventry & Warwickshire on 024 7696 6016
- Hand Therapy at Hospital of St. Cross, Rugby on 01788 663 257

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

- Post-operative hand and arm instructions
- Care after a general anaesthetic

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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