

Surgery to remove a ganglion cyst

This leaflet will help answer some of the questions you may have about ganglion cysts and possible surgical removal of the cyst. It explains the benefits, risks and alternatives to the procedure.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to speak to a doctor, therapist or nurse caring for you.

What is a ganglion cyst?

A ganglion is a fluid-filled sac that looks like a small balloon filled with water. The fluid is thick and clear. A ganglion often appears as a lump under the skin. Sometimes they are deep and are not visible on the surface. Ganglions:

- are usually attached to a structure under the skin, close to a joint or a tendon
- can be large and obvious or small and deep. They can also fluctuate in size without any special cause or reason
- are more common in women than men
- can be found in many different places throughout the arms and legs. In arms they are most often found at the back or front of the wrist, by the nail of the finger or on the front of the finger.
- do not have a specific cause and are not related to any particular activity.

What are the symptoms of a ganglion cyst?

Many ganglions have no symptoms at all. They are identified and diagnosed as a ganglion due to the presence and location of a visible lump under the skin. Your doctor may order a medical test to confirm the exact size and location of the ganglion. Ganglions near the fingernail may produce grooves in the nail. Sometimes ganglions can be sore and painful when direct pressure is placed on them. Ganglions are not cancerous and will not spread to other areas.

Why should I have a ganglion cyst removed?

You may need treatment if your ganglion is causing discomfort or making you unable to perform normal daily activities. Depending upon where it is located a ganglion can sometimes put pressure on a nerve. If this happens it may cause weakness or loss of feeling.

What happens during the surgery?

Ganglion surgery aims to remove the ganglion intact. The surgeon needs to carefully remove the ganglion and the extended part that attaches it to the tissue below the skin.

Either general, regional or local anaesthetic will be used – this will be explained to you. After the ganglion is removed the wound is stitched and a bulky bandage is put on. Time in hospital is limited to one day. This procedure is normally performed as a day case.

What are the risks?

- **Infection:** any operation can be followed by infection and this would be treated with antibiotics.
- **Scar:** you will have a scar that will be somewhat firm to touch and tender for six to eight weeks.
- **Stiffness:** this can occur if the hand is not used and exercised after the operation. This is usually temporary and can be treated with exercise given by the hand therapist.
- **Recurrence:** up to four in 10 ganglions return after being removed. There is nothing that can be specifically done to prevent them from coming back.
- **Nerve damage** can occur during your surgery which results in either a painful spot in the scar or some loss of feeling in the hand. This complication is very rare but may need a further operation to correct.
- **Blood vessel injury:** ganglions at the wrist are often very close to major blood vessels. Damage to the vessel is very rare and can be immediately repaired.
- **Changes in the nail:** ganglions on the tip of the finger often cause a groove in the nail. It usually settles after the operation but occasionally it can persist after or result from the surgery.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Observation: in many cases ganglions can simply be observed. If they do not cause pain or limit daily activity then there is no need for surgical treatment.

Aspiration: an aspiration can be performed to remove the fluid from the cyst. This involves placing a needle into the cyst and removing the fluid from the sac. This will make the cyst smaller. It does not remove the sac or the stem of the ganglion. Often the fluid returns. Sometimes this procedure is considered before surgery to see if the removal of the fluid improves your symptoms.

Will you feel pain?

You will be given either:

- regional anaesthesia that makes the whole arm numb;
- local anaesthesia that will make just one finger or part of your hand numb; or
- general anaesthesia that will cause you to sleep.

For more information on anaesthetic, please read our leaflet **Having an anaesthetic**.

The medical team will provide you with appropriate pain medication to help reduce any pain you might have after your surgery. It is important that you take your pain relief on a regular basis for the first few days. When taken regularly the medication is kept at a constant level in your body and will control your discomfort more effectively. Any medication given to you will be explained before you leave the hospital.

What should I look out for at home?

Dizziness and tiredness: if you have had a general anaesthetic you might feel dizzy and tired when you go home after the operation. Please rest for the remainder of the day and the following day to help you recover from the general anaesthetic. The anaesthetic will take up to 24 hours to wear off. You do not need to stay in bed. Gently moving around your home will help your blood circulation and help to prevent blood clots.

Swelling: you can help to prevent or reduce swelling in your fingers by placing your arm on a couple of pillows when you are sitting or resting. You will also be given a sling. Wear this when you are not seated or resting.

Dressing: you will have a padded dressing over your wound. You may also have a partial plaster cast that will prevent you from moving your wrist. You will be informed on the day of your surgery when that will be removed. Your surgeon will decide the amount of time the dressing should remain in place. Often it must remain in place for at least one week. You will most likely have stitches in your hand or wrist. Those are usually removed within 10 – 13 days. Please do not let your hand get wet. If necessary, cover it with a plastic bag tied at the wrist or a large rubber glove.

Follow up appointments

You will be given a follow-up appointment to have your dressings and stitches removed, which will either be with the plastics dressings nurses or with hand therapy. Your surgeon may recommend that you attend hand therapy for a splint or exercises. You will also have a follow-up appointment scheduled with the surgeon.

These appointments will be given to you before you leave the hospital on the day of your surgery.

If we are unable to schedule any of the appointments that day, we will send you details of the appointment by letter.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the plastics surgery access team on **020 7188 8882**, Monday–Friday 9am–5pm.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and Accessible Support Services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch:

t: 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

t: 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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