

Ganglion cyst

What is a ganglion cyst?

A ganglion cyst is a sac filled with jelly-like fluid that comes from joints or from around tendons. It is a benign condition (it is not a cancer). The wrist and the hand are the most commonly involved, but they can also occur around the ankle or foot.

What problems do they cause?

Larger ganglia can be cosmetically unsightly. Sometimes ganglia can cause an ache or pain when using the wrist and hand.

What will happen if I decide to leave the ganglion untreated?

Local research in the East Midlands reveals that more than half (56%) of ganglia disappear over a period of 6 years if untreated. Most children's ganglia resolve more swiftly.

What are the benefits of ganglion excision/removal?

Two thirds of removed ganglia do not come back, although a small number of patients are left with a tender scar or some permanent wrist stiffness.

What are the risks and consequences associated with surgery?

Unfortunately the ganglion cyst comes back quite frequently (in almost one third of cases).

In addition, 15% of patients experience some tenderness in the scar or some persistent wrist stiffness. However, 80% of patients in the East Midlands patient review were satisfied with the treatment received.

A small percentage of patients after hand surgery will develop a severe reaction, with lifelong permanent pain and stiffness which is unresponsive to treatment.

Alternative treatment

Sucking the fluid out of the ganglion cyst can take place in the outpatient department, using a syringe and needle (sometimes with an injection of steroid). More than half (57%) recur after this treatment, but there are no additional problems (eg. scar tenderness or wrist stiffness).

If you decide to have no treatment at all, there is a 50% chance the ganglion will disappear over the next 2 years, with a 56% chance of the ganglion disappearing by 6 years.

If you are concerned about any of these risks, or have any further queries, please speak to your consultant.

Getting ready for the operation

You will be asked to attend the **Pre-operative Assessment Clinic**. A specialist nurse will discuss the operation with you. You may need to undergo some routine tests before your operation eg. heart trace (ECG), x-ray, blood test. Please feel free to ask questions and raise any concerns that you may have regarding your operation.

You will be asked some routine questions about your general health, including whether you smoke or drink alcohol, any allergies you may have and any medicines you are taking at present.

It would be helpful if you bring your medicines with you. The nurse will need to know their name and the strength. This includes non-prescription medicines including herbal/complimentary medicines.

For a time before certain types of anaesthetic you will need to stop eating, drinking and chewing gum. This will be explained to you and you may also be given a booklet about this. If you have any questions please contact the hospital - telephone number on your admission letter.

You will be asked to shower or bathe before your operation.

Smoking cessation

Smoking greatly increases the risk of complications during and after surgery, so the sooner you can stop the better. Even a few days before your operation can help to improve healing and recovery afterwards. For free help and advice contact your GP or Fresh Start Stop Smoking Service.

On admission

You would usually be admitted to hospital as a day case (7.30am arrival if you are on a morning operating list, 1.00pm if you are on an afternoon operating list).

When you arrive on the ward you will be introduced to the staff and shown to your bed. Your details (name, date of birth etc) will be checked on a number of occasions before the operation. This is normal practice and is for your safety. You will be given an operation gown and a wristband to wear.

You will have the opportunity to discuss the surgery with the staff. It is important that you understand what you have come into hospital for, as you will be asked to sign a consent form to this effect.

You will be given the choice of walking to the anaesthetic room or alternatively you could be taken in a wheelchair if you wish.

What sort of anaesthetic will I have?

The operation is usually performed under general anaesthetic, which means you will be asleep throughout. The anaesthetist will visit you before your operation and discuss the anaesthetic with you.

What does the operation to remove the ganglion involve?

It involves the total excision of the ganglion down to the joint or tendon from which it arises. A surgical arm cuff (a tourniquet) will be used during the operation.

What should I expect after the operation?

When the operation is over, you will have your pulse, blood pressure, breathing and wounds checked regularly by a nurse.

It is usual to feel drowsy for several hours. You will be given oxygen through a facemask until you are more awake.

General anaesthetics can sometimes make people feel sick. The nurse may offer you an injection if the sick feeling does not go away, this will help to settle it.

You will have a drip running into a vein in your arm/hand until you are eating and drinking again.

Going home

You would usually go home the same day (day case) and you will require someone to collect you from hospital.

DISCHARGE INFORMATION AND AT HOME ADVICE

A bulky dressing is applied in the operating theatre. You will need to keep it clean and dry until the stitches are removed in the nurse led clinic in 10 - 14 days.

The wrist is often a little stiff for several weeks.

No physiotherapy is usually required unless wrist stiffness remains a problem at that time.

What size scar will I have and how many stitches?

The length of the scar will depend in part on the size of the ganglion and the site. The incision is commonly about 5cms long (2 inches).

The number of stitches is variable but we aim to make the scar as cosmetically acceptable as possible.

Driving

You should be able to return to driving within 2 - 4 weeks after surgery.

Time off work

If you are in a supervisory or managerial position that does not require full use of the hand, you could return to work within a few days of surgery.

Other light manual occupations will require 2 - 3 weeks off work.

A heavy manual job will require you to be off work for a few weeks longer.

Important information for day case patients

You must not drive or go home by public transport. Therefore, you must make arrangements for someone to collect you. It is not appropriate to go home unaccompanied in a taxi. Please note hospital transport and ambulances are not normally available for day patients.

The anaesthetic drugs remain in your body for 24 hours and during this time are gradually excreted from the body. You are under the influence of drugs during this time and therefore there are certain things that you should and should not do.

You should:

- Ensure that a responsible adult stays at home with you for 24 hours.
- Rest quietly at home for the rest of the day - go to bed or lie on the settee.
- Drink plenty of fluids, but not too much tea or coffee.
- Eat a light diet eg. soup or sandwiches. Avoid greasy or heavy food as this may cause you to feel sick.
- Lie flat if you feel faint or dizzy.
- Contact your GP if you have not passed urine 12 hours after your operation.
- Have a lie in the next day. It could take 2 - 3 days before the weariness wears off and you could suffer lapses in concentration for up to a week.

For at least 24 hours after your operation you must not:

- Lock yourself in the bathroom or toilet or make yourself inaccessible to the person looking after you.
- Operate any domestic appliances or machinery.
- Drink alcohol.
- Make any important decisions or sign any important documents.
- Be responsible for looking after small children.
- Watch too much television, read too much or use a computer as this can cause blurred vision.

If you have any queries, or require further information please contact your consultant's secretary on the number on the enclosed leaflet

NHS Direct is a 24 hour nurse led, confidential service providing general health care advice and information.

Telephone 0845 4647 or visit the website at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

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