

Excision of a Ganglion Patient Information

What is a ganglion?

A ganglion is a lump under the skin that contains fluid.

Your surgeon has recommended an operation to remove your ganglion. However, it is your decision to go ahead with the operation or not. This document will give you enough information about the benefits and risks so you can make an informed decision.

If you have any questions that this document does not answer, you should ask your surgeon or any member of the healthcare team.

How does a ganglion happen?

Ganglions usually form near joints. 3 out of 4 ganglions form near the wrist joint (see figure 1). They are also found on the ankle and foot.

The fluid in the ganglion comes from the joint through a narrow channel. Some ganglions happen after an injury such as a sprain, but most appear without a known cause.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The lump and any discomfort from it should disappear. Surgery gives the best chance of stopping the ganglion coming back.

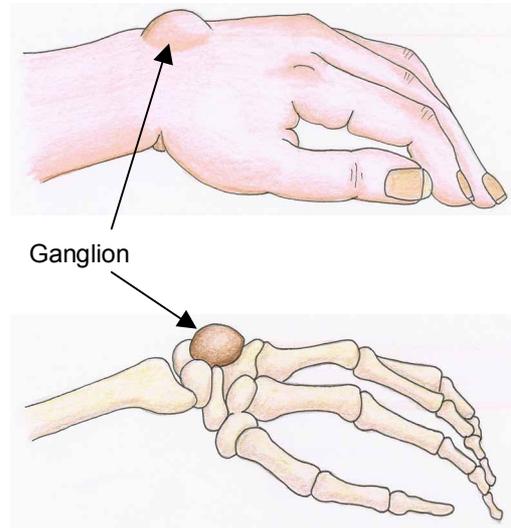


Figure 1
Typical position and appearance of a ganglion

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

A ganglion will often disappear on its own after a year or two. If your ganglion is not causing much trouble, it is best to leave it alone.

The fluid can be taken out of the ganglion using a needle. This confirms that you do have a ganglion and improves any discomfort for a while. Your doctor may also inject the ganglion with a steroid (cortisone). These treatments may help for a short time but the ganglion often comes back.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation?

A ganglion is not serious. It will often disappear on its own.

What does the operation involve?

A variety of anaesthetic techniques are possible. Your anaesthetist will discuss the options with you and will recommend the best form of anaesthesia for you.

Your surgeon will make a cut over the ganglion and carefully separate the ganglion from the nearby tendons, nerves and blood vessels. They will then remove the ganglion from where it comes out of the joint.

The place where the ganglion is actually removed could be a little way from where you can feel the main lump, so the cut may need to be bigger than you expected.

At the end of the operation, your surgeon will close the skin with stitches.

What can I do to help make the operation a success?

• Lifestyle changes

If you smoke, try to stop smoking now. There is strong evidence that stopping smoking several weeks or more before an anaesthetic reduces your chances of getting complications.

If you are overweight, losing weight will reduce your chances of developing complications.

If you need help to stop smoking or lose weight, ask a member of the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

• Medication

You should continue your normal medication unless you are told otherwise.

Let your surgeon know if you are on **warfarin** or **clopidogrel**. Follow your surgeon's advice about stopping this medication before the operation.

What complications can happen?

The healthcare team will try to make your operation as safe as possible. However, complications can happen. Some of these can be serious. You should ask your doctor if there is anything you do not understand. Any numbers which relate to risk are from studies of people who have had this operation. Your doctor may be able to tell you if the risk of a complication is higher or lower for you.

The complications fall into three categories.

- 1 Complications of anaesthesia
- 2 General complications of any operation
- 3 Specific complications of this operation

1 Complications of anaesthesia

Your anaesthetist will be able to discuss with you the possible complications of having an anaesthetic.

2 General complications of any operation

- **Pain**, which happens with every operation. The healthcare team will try to reduce your pain. They will give you medication to control the pain and it is important that you take it as you are told so you can move about as advised.

- **Bleeding** during or after surgery.

- **Infection in the wound**. If this happens, you may need antibiotics or another operation.

- **Unsightly scarring** of the skin. This can sometimes be a problem if the scar is on the front of your wrist.

3 Specific complications of this operation

- **Damage to small nerves near the ganglion**. If this happens, you may get a small patch of numbness or a painful scar (risk: 1 in 15). This usually gets better with time.



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How soon will I recover?

• In hospital

After the operation you will be transferred to the recovery area and then to the ward.

You should be able to go home the same day. However, your doctor may recommend that you stay a little longer.

If you are worried about anything, in hospital or at home, ask a member of the healthcare team. They should be able to reassure you or identify and treat any complications.

• Returning to normal activities

Your surgeon, physiotherapist and occupational therapist will tell you when you can return to normal activities. Your surgeon will tell you if there are any stitches that need to be removed. Sometimes dissolvable stitches are used and these will disappear on their own.

Any joint stiffness should get better fairly quickly.

Do not drive until you are confident about controlling your vehicle and always check with your insurance company first.

• The future

The scar can look quite thick for a few months, especially if it is on the front of your wrist. The joint where the ganglion was can continue to ache. This may happen because of wear and tear of the joint itself.

Some ganglions come back after a few months or years (risk: 1 in 10).

Summary

A ganglion is not serious. If it is causing trouble, your surgeon can remove it.

Surgery is usually safe and effective. However, complications can happen. You need to know about them to help you to make an informed decision about surgery. Knowing about them will also help to detect and treat any problems early.

Paying for your operation

The costs of an Excision of a Ganglion are covered by most medical insurance policies. However, we strongly advise you to check with your insurer before you are admitted to the hospital. If you are paying for your own treatment, the cost of the operation will be explained to you, and confirmed in writing, when you book the operation. Your consultant's secretary or the hospital can give you an estimate beforehand.

Further information

You can also get further information from:

- **Your local BMI Hospital**
- www.aboutmyhealth.org - for support and information you can trust
- American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons at www.aaos.org
- www.eatonhand.com
- NHS Direct on 0845 46 47 47 (0845 606 46 47 - textphone)
- www.eidohealthcare.com

Tell us how useful you found this document at www.patientfeedback.org

Acknowledgements

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