

Ganglion Cyst

WHAT IS A GANGLION CYST AND HOW DOES IT HAPPEN?

A ganglion cyst is a lump that forms near joints or tendons. A ganglion is filled with the clear thick fluid that is inside our joints. The fluid in the joint is usually held inside by a tissue that surrounds the joint called a capsule. If there is damage to the capsule tissue fluid can leak out of the joint causing a ganglion. The same process can happen in the sheath that surrounds a tendon. It can appear suddenly or develop gradually over time. Ganglion cysts can be different sizes and can change size, appear or disappear quickly. They are the most common lump in the hand. They are usually harmless. They do not spread to other areas.

We don't know why people develop ganglions. Sometimes they happen after an injury or they develop on their own. They can get bigger or more painful with activity.

They often happen on the back or front of the wrist, at the bottom of a finger on the palm side, or at the top joint of a finger. Sometimes they are so small that you can't see them, these are called occult ganglions.

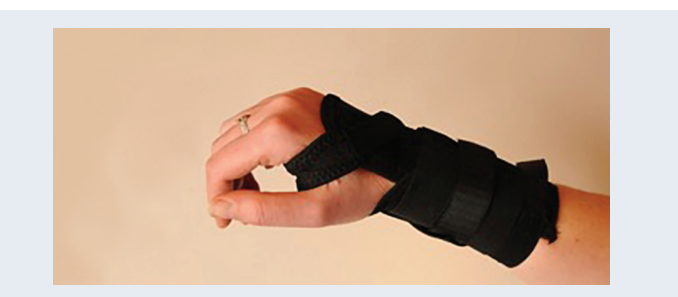


HOW IS A GANGLION CYST TREATED?

Hand Therapy

Your hand therapist will assess your hand. The aim of hand therapy is to reduce pain and help get full movement, strength and use of your hand back. Your hand therapy treatment may include

- A wrist splint. If you have a painful or large ganglion in your wrist, wearing a splint can help reduce irritation of the ganglion, this may also make the ganglion smaller.
- Modifying activity. When symptoms are from a certain sport or work activity your therapist can suggest ways to change how you use the arm in these to reduce the pain and help stop a flare up of your symptoms.
- Improving strength and control of your wrist in activity.



Aspiration or Surgery

If your ganglion is very painful or stops you doing things a needle can be used to pull some of the fluid out. This is called an aspiration. Sometimes you can have some corticosteroid injected into the area at the same time. This is to stop swelling and pain.

If you have ongoing problems with a painful ganglions your hand therapist can refer you to a surgeon for review.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT FROM MY HAND THERAPY REHABILITATION?

A hand therapist will ask you questions about your pain and swelling and what activities make it hurt or feel better. They will measure how much you can move your wrist or hand, and how strong you are. They will feel the lump and test your ability to weight bear through your wrist. From this assessment, they will be able to tell if your problem is a ganglion.

Most ganglions will settle down with rest after 4-6 weeks. If this hasn't happened, your hand therapist may send you to have an ultrasound scan. This type of scan shows how big the ganglion is, and where it is coming from.

Your hand therapist will show you ways to use your wrist to reduce pain from the ganglion and avoid future flare ups. You will be shown strength and stability exercises for the wrist and graded exercises to return to weight bearing.

Your hand therapist may also send you to a doctor for an aspiration or a cortisone injection. If this happens, you should wear a splint for 2-4 weeks afterwards.

If nothing else has worked, your hand therapist may refer you to a surgeon.

Do

- Remember to wear your splint.
- Avoid the activities that bring on your symptoms.
- Rest your arm between activities, especially if you are doing anything heavy or repetitive

Do Not

- Do lots of forceful gripping or repetitive wrist movement at one time



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WHAT SHOULD I LOOK OUT FOR?

- Look out for activity that causes pain or swelling in your hand and arm, try to avoid it, and tell your hand therapist.
- If your splint is uncomfortable book an appointment to see your hand therapist.
- If things are getting worse or your pain and swelling keeps coming back when you are doing normal daily activities, book an appointment to see your hand therapist.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DO NOT HAVE TREATMENT?

Ganglion cysts are not dangerous. If you do not have any treatment the pain and swelling may settle down with rest. However if it is a large ganglion and you are doing a lot of lifting or leaning on your hand then it may remain painful.

CONTACT DETAILS AND REFERENCES

Your hand therapist is

Merivale Hand Clinic (03) 3559775

Rehabilitation of the Hand and Upper Extremity, Sixth Edition. Ed Skirven, Osterman, Fedorczyk, Amadio. Pp 291-293. <http://www.houstonmethodist.org/orthopedics/where-does-it-hurt/wrist/ganglions/>