

InfoSheet – Ganglion Cysts

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WHAT IS THIS BUMP?

Ganglion cysts are the most common benign soft tissue masses seen in the hand and wrist. A ganglion cyst is a fluid filled balloon of soft tissue that comes either out of a joint or out of the lining of a tendon. They tend to get larger with activity, and smaller with rest, and at times they may go away completely only to return with new activity in the future. Some ganglion cysts can be very painful, while others have no pain associated with them. In some people the cyst is causing the pain, while in others the cyst is just there and visible while it is the joint itself that is painful.



Common Ganglion Locations

While they do tend to get larger and smaller in size, and may often appear threatening just by their appearance, ganglion cysts are not a type of cancer or other malignant process.

Ganglion cysts are usually found in the wrists and ankles, but they can also appear at the shoulder, elbow, and knee.

WHAT CAUSES THESE CYSTS?

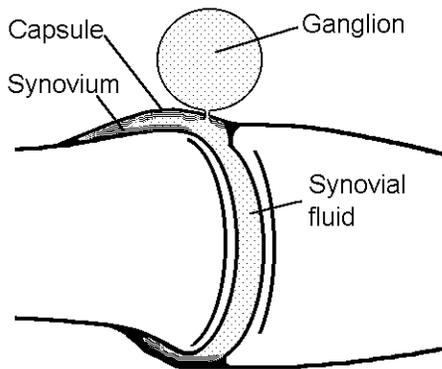
Ganglion cysts are thought to be the result of an injury to a joint or to the lining of a tendon. They usually occur in certain common positions such as the back of the wrist, the front of the wrist near the thumb, and the last knuckles of the fingers.

The cause is not clearly known, but one theory is that a small hole in the joint lining or tendon sheath allows fluid to escape, but not get back to its proper place. This leads to the constant growth of the balloon filled with fluid, as would happen if fluid passes through a 'flap valve.' X-rays may be taken to examine the adjacent joint.

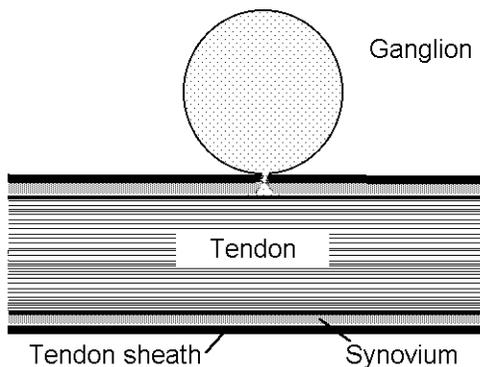
HOW ARE THESE CYSTS TREATED?

Ganglion cysts can disappear on their own. If the cyst grows, causes pain or numbness, inhibits function, or keeps coming back, treatment is needed. Treatment is often dictated by how problematic the cysts are. This can be "watchful waiting" for a cyst that is not painful and is not interfering with the activity. Often, temporary splinting of the joint (such as with a wrist splint) will allow the cyst to get smaller or even completely resolve.

Fluid can be removed from the cyst with a needle, and the cyst itself can be removed with surgery.



Cross-section of a ganglion forming from a joint

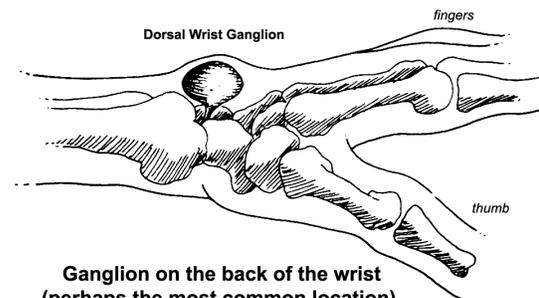


Cross-section of a ganglion forming from a tendon sheath

WHAT TYPE OF SURGERY IS DONE FOR GANGLION CYSTS?

The goal in surgery is to remove not only the body of this cyst (the part that is most visible), but also to remove source of the cyst, which is referred to as the **neck**. The cyst, along with its neck and a piece of joint capsule or tendon sheath, are removed to allow re-healing of the area. Some type of cysts can be removed 'inside-out' using arthroscopy.

The affected joint is then splinted for one to two weeks after removal of the cyst, after which regular activity can begin. In some people (five to ten percent), the cysts may return. Additionally, new cysts may form nearby or in other locations.



Ganglion on the back of the wrist (perhaps the most common location). Originating from the SCAPHOLUNATE LIGAMENT

Close-up of a scapholunate ganglion

