

Information for Patients

Surgery to remove a ganglion should only be carried out when specific criteria are met. This is because the medical evidence tells us that the intervention can sometimes do more harm than good. There are alternative treatments and often no treatment is needed.

About the condition

A ganglion is a swelling filled with clear jelly that usually develops near a joint or tendon. Ganglia can occur alongside any joint in the body, but are most common on the wrist, hands and fingers. They can range from the size of a small seed to the size of a golf ball and they feel like a smooth lump under the skin.

Ganglia at the wrist rarely cause significant symptoms, but can be uncomfortable and sometimes painful. Ganglia in the palm of your hand may cause discomfort when carrying objects.

The clinician treating you may insert a hypodermic needle into the ganglion to establish that the lump is nothing more than a cyst full of jelly. Sometimes this procedure itself relieves the pain and gets rid of the ganglion, but many come back. If the ganglion does come back it does not always need further treatment. If it causes sufficiently troublesome symptoms which interfere with hand function then surgical removal may be considered.

It's important you and your doctor make a shared decision about what's best for you if your ganglion is becoming a problem. When deciding what's best you should both consider the benefits, the risks, the alternatives and what will happen if you do nothing.

What are the **BENEFITS** of the intervention?

Surgery can relieve pain and discomfort and improve hand function if needle aspiration has not been successful.

What are the **RISKS** of the intervention?

The risks of surgery include pain, bleeding, infection, scarring and recurrence of the ganglion. It can take up to six weeks to recover and for your hand function to return fully.

What are the **ALTERNATIVES**?

If the ganglion is not causing troublesome symptoms there is no need to do anything, and it may well resolve spontaneously in time.

What if you do **NOTHING**?

Doing nothing will not be harmful to your health and most ganglia go away in time without treatment. Most people are not bothered by ganglia and treatment should only be considered if there are significant symptoms or restrictions.

You can find out more about the [NHS Evidence Based Interventions](#) programme online.