

Introduction

Ganglion cysts are common. They may cause pain and discomfort in the hand and may affect its usage.

Doctors may recommend surgery for people suffering from ganglion cysts.

If your doctor recommends surgical treatment for your condition, the decision whether or not to have surgery is also yours.

This reference summary will help you understand better the benefits and risks of this surgery.

Anatomy of the Hand

The hand consists of many bones.

The bones are separated by special hinges called joints. Muscles make the bones move on their joints.

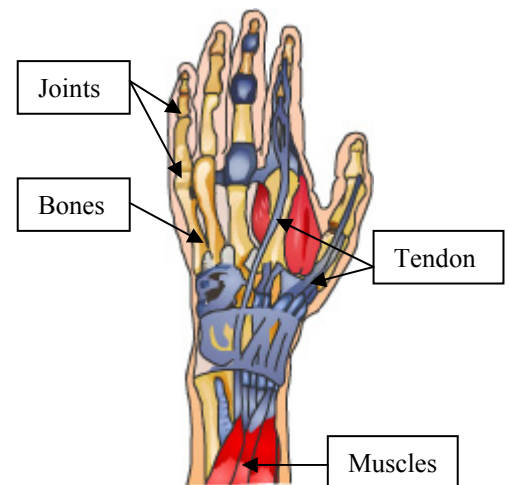
These joints contain fluid that lubricates them, allowing for smooth motion. You can grip objects with your hand because of muscles located in the forearm.

Each muscle is formed of two parts. The fleshy part of the muscle contracts and is the part that creates the movement of the bones.

The tendon part of the muscle extends into the hand and attaches to the fingers.

The muscles are attached to the bones of the forearms at the fleshy part.

The muscles taper down and become tendons through the wrist and into the fingers, where they attach to the bones of the fingers.

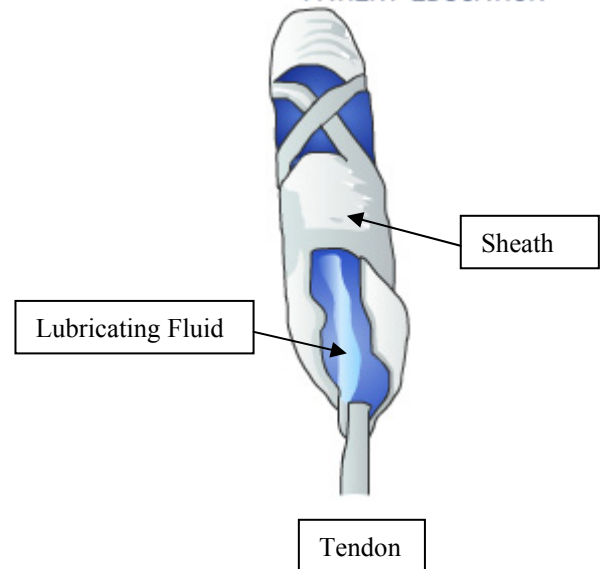


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When the fleshy part of the muscle contracts, the tendon is pulled down toward the forearm like a cable and the fingers bend.

Some of the tendons are covered by a special tube containing lubricating fluid. This allows smooth and painless movement.

The tendons and their covering tubes are held in place by a specialized covering called a sheath.



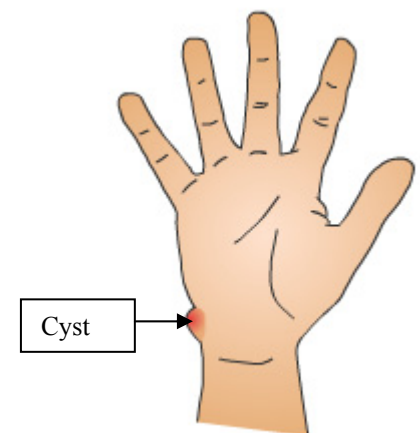
Symptoms and Their Causes

The lubricating fluid in the joints or around the tendons can accumulate and form ganglion cysts.

Some of these cysts occur after some kind of trauma or accident. However, there is no known reason for the majority of these cysts.

Repeated usage of the hand could predispose to the formation of ganglion cysts. They tend to be more common in women.

These cysts could increase and decrease in size and may go away on their own. They never become cancers.



Diagnosis

The hand surgeon or orthopedic surgeon will ask you about how long you have had this lump, whether it is painful and whether it has changed in size.

He or she will then feel it and see if it is attached to a joint

X-rays of the hand and possibly an MRI of the hand may be done.

Some of these ganglions can be very painful and may actually not be apparent to the outside. In such cases an MRI can be very important in making the diagnosis.

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Alternative Treatments

Avoiding repetitive motion may help with the symptoms. A wrist brace may be used to decrease the size of the ganglion.

An alternative treatment includes removing the fluid from the cyst with a syringe. This is called 'aspirating.'

When all else fails, an operation may help.

Surgical Treatment

The operation is done through a skin incision. The size and location of the incision depends on the size and location of the ganglion cyst.

The surgical procedure aims at removing, or resecting, the cyst.

The operation can be done under local, regional, or general anesthesia.

This surgery is usually done as an outpatient operation where the patient goes home the same day of the operation.

Risks and Complications

This operation is very safe with excellent results. There are, however, several possible risks and complications, which are unlikely, but possible.

You need to know about them just in case they happen. By being informed, you may be able to help your doctor detect complications early.

The risks and complications include those related to anesthesia and those related to any type of surgery.

This procedure can be done using different types of anesthesia, local, regional or general.

Your surgeon will tell you which one will be used and the anesthesiologist will further discuss with you the type of anesthesia as well as its risks and complications.



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Some of the risks are seen in any type of surgery. These include:

- Infection, deep in the hand or at the skin level.
- Bleeding.
- Skin scar that may be painful or ugly.

Other risks and complications are related specifically to this surgery. These again are very rare. However, it is important to know about them.

Small nerves may be injured, resulting in weakness, paralysis, and loss of feeling in the hand.

The tendon may be injured, resulting in weakness of the hand.

There is also the possibility that the operation may restrict joint motion. The cyst may also recur.

After the Surgery

Your hand will be bandaged. Your doctor will ask you to keep your hand elevated above heart level to reduce swelling. When you shower, you will need to cover the dressing with a plastic bag

Your doctor will tell you how long it will take before you can go back to work. This depends on your age, type of work, your surgery, as well as other factors. Your doctor will arrange for a follow-up visit to examine the incision and remove any sutures. Your doctor will indicate the hand rehabilitation program suitable for you.



Summary

The lubricating fluid in the joints or around the tendons can accumulate and form ganglion cysts. It causes pain and discomfort in the hand and affects its usage.

Hand surgery can help relieve your pain and immobility when other non-surgical treatments fail.

This operation is very safe with excellent results. However, as you have learned, complications may happen. Knowing about them will help you detect them early if they happen.



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