

# DR REBECCA AYERS

## Plastic, Reconstructive and Hand Surgeon

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### GANGLION

#### What is it?

Is a cyst that is usually attached to an underlying joint capsule or tendon sheath. The walls of the cyst are made of connective tissue and the cyst is filled with a thick clear fluid.

Ganglions occur around the wrist, within the palm or associated with the little joints of the fingers (mucous cysts).

Ganglions are benign.

#### Why does it occur?

The cause of ganglions are unknown. Proposed mechanisms include trapped joint fluid, out-pouching of the joint lining or it may be due to degeneration of connective tissue with chronically irritated mesenchymal cells and fibroblasts secreting mucin. This may be related to trauma or certain usage patterns.

Ganglions of the little joints of the fingers are frequently associated with arthritis.

#### Does the ganglion need treating?

If the ganglion causes no problem, then treatment is not required. Ganglions may disappear by themselves and it is often best to wait 12 months before deciding upon treatment. The ganglion may cause discomfort, limit range of movement or put pressure on a nerve. The swelling is sometimes unsightly. Ganglions of the end finger joint may press on the nail bed and causes grooving and distortion of the nail. When the ganglion causes prolonged problems, treatment may be sought.

#### What are treatment options?

Options include aspiration, injection of steroid and surgical excision. Surgery has the lowest rate of recurrence.

##### **Surgery**

- Requires a general or local anaesthetic
- Removes the sac right down to the underlying joint capsule or tendon sheath
- Sometimes ganglions of the finger tip need a local flap or skin graft to replace the extremely thin skin over the cyst
- The hand is dressed in a simple dressing and you are discharged with a sheet of instructions on how to care for your hand and exercises to perform during the healing process
- Sutures are either dissolving or are removed about 2 weeks following surgery
- You may drive after one week if you are comfortable and have a full range of finger movements
- Return to work does depend on your occupation – for heavy manual labourers it may be 4-6 weeks

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- Possible complications

- Bleeding
- Infection
- Delayed wound healing
- Scarring
- Stiffness : completing hand exercises as directed will prevent this from occurring
- Complex regional pain syndrome : some people have hands that are very sensitive to surgery or trauma and become very painful, stiff and swollen following surgery. This is treated with special kinds of pain relief and physiotherapy.
- Recurrence : occurs in about 10% of cases
- Damage to nerves and vessels
- Failure of nail deformity to completely resolve

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