

Ganglion Cyst

What is a ganglion cyst?

A ganglion cyst is a swollen, closed sac under the skin. The sac is attached to the sheath of a tendon or may be attached to a joint. The cyst contains fluid similar to joint fluid. It can vary in size from a small pea to a golf ball. Ganglion cysts are the most common type of mass that occurs in the hand or wrist. They may also occur in the foot.

How does it occur?

The cause of ganglion cysts is not known.

What are the symptoms?

You may feel discomfort or pain. Sometimes the area of the cyst becomes swollen or disfigured.

How is it diagnosed?

Your health care provider may stick a needle into the cyst to take a sample of the fluid inside it.

How is it treated?

Unless a cyst hurts, it does not need to be treated. If it does hurt, put ice on it for 20 to 30 minutes three or four times a day, or at least once daily, until it becomes less painful. Taking aspirin or other anti-inflammatory drugs may also help.

The fluid can be removed with a needle, but the cysts tend to fill up again with fluid. Do not try to smash the cyst with a heavy object. Even if this home remedy succeeds at first, the cyst will almost always fill up again with fluid. In addition, you could seriously damage your wrist.

If the cyst is painful or unsightly, it can be surgically removed. Surgery to remove the cyst requires making a small cut through the skin. The cut usually heals quickly and leaves a small scar.

How long will the effects last?

Sometimes cysts go away whether they are treated or not. If your cyst is painful or continues to get bigger, you may need to have surgery.

How can I take care of myself?

Follow the treatment recommended by your health care provider.

When can I return to my sport or activity?

The goal of rehabilitation is to return you to your sport or activity as soon as is safely possible. If you return too soon you may worsen your injury, which could lead to permanent damage. Everyone recovers from injury at a different rate. Return to your sport will be measured by how soon your wrist recovers, not by how many days or weeks it has been since your injury occurred. In general, the longer you have symptoms before you start treatment, the longer it will take to get better.

You may return to your sport or activity when you have a wrist ganglion if you can do your activities without pain. You may need to wear a wrist brace or have your wrist taped. In sports such as gymnastics, you will not be able to participate fully until you can bear weight on your wrist while tumbling without pain. In sports such as baseball or tennis, it is important that your wrist does not hurt when you are holding the bat or racquet while doing your swing.

How can I help prevent ganglion cysts?

There is no known way to prevent these cysts because their cause is not known.

