Cysts - ganglion cysts
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Summary

- A ganglion cyst is a benign ball of fluid that grows on a tendon or joint.
- The backs of the hands and wrists are most commonly affected, but ganglion cysts can also grow on the feet, knees and ankles.
- In many cases, ganglion cysts go away by themselves without the need for medical treatment.
- Treatment options include surgery or draining the cyst with a needle.

A tendon is a tough band of connective tissue that joins muscle to bone. Tendons and joints have a covering of membrane that produces a lubricating fluid to assist their function. A ganglion cyst is a benign (non-cancerous) ball of fluid that grows on the membrane or sheath that covers these tendons and joints. The backs of the hands and wrists are most commonly affected, but ganglion cysts can sometimes grow on the feet, knees and ankles. A ganglion cyst is the most common lump on the hand, and tends to target women between the ages of 20 and 40 years of age, for reasons unknown.

As tendons anchor muscle to bone, a ganglion cyst on a tendon may cause muscle weakness. Depending on the individual, there may be just one large lump or a collection of many smaller ones attached to a single 'stalk' deeper in the tissue. Around one third to one half of ganglion cysts disappear on their own without the need for medical treatment. However, it is best to consult your doctor to make sure the swelling is not a symptom of some other type of illness.

Symptoms of ganglion cysts

The symptoms of a ganglion cyst include:

- Noticeable swelling or lump.
- The lump is able to change its size, including going away completely only to return.
- The lump is usually soft and immobile.
- In some cases, the lump is painful and aching, particularly those at the base of fingers.
- The affected tendon may cause a sensation of muscular weakness.
- Other sites include the back of the knee (Bakers cyst), ankle, foot, palm and fingers.

Causes of ganglion cysts

No one knows what causes a ganglion cyst to form. Some of the theories include:

- The body responds to injury, trauma or overuse by forming an internal 'blister'.
- Small tears in the tendon membrane or joint capsule allow the contents to squeeze out.

Ganglion cysts can disappear

Around 30 to 50 per cent of ganglion cysts disappear by themselves without the need for medical treatment. However, it is always best to consult your doctor to make sure the lump isn't a symptom of some other disease. If your ganglion cyst is painful, or if it interferes with your mobility or causes sensations of numbness or pins and needles, see your doctor.

Diagnosis of ganglion cysts

Ganglion cysts are diagnosed using a number of tests including:

- Medical history
- Physical examination
- Ultrasound
- X-rays
- Needle aspiration (a fine needle is used to draw off fluid, which is then examined in a laboratory).

Treatment for ganglion cysts

Ganglion cysts used to be treated by slamming them with a heavy book such as a Bible - which explains the term 'Bible therapy'. This isn't a good idea, as you could cause further injury. Medical treatment options include:

- Close monitoring - if the ganglion cyst isn't causing pain or interfering with movement, some doctors prefer to wait and see. The cyst may simply disappear on its own.
- Needle aspiration - one of the tests to diagnose ganglion cysts involves drawing off the fluid with a fine needle. In many cases (around 75 per cent), this
treatment empties the cyst and no further action is needed.

- **Surgery** - the cyst or cysts are surgically removed, usually by a specialist such as an orthopaedic surgeon. Ganglion cysts of the feet will usually require surgery.

**Joint mobility after treatment**

Whether your ganglion cyst is aspirated or surgically removed, you will be fitted with a splint for around one week or so. Depending on the location of the excised ganglion cyst, full recovery can be anywhere from two to eight weeks. Be guided by your doctor or health care professional, but generally it is best to get the joint moving again as soon as possible. Using splints for extended periods of time can actually hamper joint mobility. Your doctor will give you specific exercises to perform.

**Ganglion cysts may return**

Ganglion cysts may grow back after treatment. This is less likely if your cysts were surgically removed rather than aspirated with a needle. Some estimates suggest that around half of patients who undergo needle aspiration can expect a recurrence. Since the cause of ganglion cysts is unknown, prevention is impossible. If you suspect your ganglion cyst is recurring, see your doctor for further treatment. A ganglion cyst that is aspirated three times has a better than 80 per cent chance of being cured.

**Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Orthopaedic surgeon

**Things to remember**

- A ganglion cyst is a benign ball of fluid that grows on a tendon or joint.
- The backs of the hands and wrists are most commonly affected, but ganglion cysts can also grow on the feet, knees and ankles.
- The cause is unknown, but it is thought that small tears in the tendon membrane or joint capsule allow the contents to squeeze out.
- In many cases, ganglion cysts go away by themselves without the need for medical treatment.
- Treatment options include surgery or draining the cyst with a needle.

**References**

- Pattison, Dr A., 'Finding a lump - some types', in *Common Consultations* [online book], North East Valley Division of General Practice, Victoria, Australia.  
  More information here.
- Ganglion cyst (2000) [online article], Indiana Hand Centre, MANUS, USA.  
  More information here.

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Bones muscles and joints

The following content is displayed as Tabs. Once you have activated a link navigate to the end of the list to view its associated content. The activated link is defined as Active Tab

- Bone muscle and joint basics
- Healthy bones muscles and joints
- Bone and bone marrow conditions
- Osteoporosis
- Muscle conditions
- Joint conditions
- Hand and foot conditions
- Back neck and spine conditions

Bone muscle and joint basics

- Bone marrow
  Bone marrow is the spongy tissue in the hollow centres of a person's long bones and is the blood cell 'factory'

- Bones
  The adult skeleton is made up of 206 bones, which provide the structure for our bodies

- Choosing the right shoe
  The right footwear can help keep your feet healthy, make your physical activity easier and help keep your body safe from injury

- Growth hormone
  Some athletes and bodybuilders wrongly believe that taking synthetic growth hormone will help build up their muscles

- Joints
  A joint is the part of the body where two or more bones meet to allow movement
Locomotor system
The skeleton and skeletal muscles work together to allow movement.

Muscles
There are about 600 muscles in the human body.

Healthy bones muscles and joints

- 10 tips for getting enough vitamin D
  A balanced UV approach is required to ensure some sun exposure for vitamin D while minimising the risk of skin cancer.
- 10 tips for safe stretching
  Make stretching part of your life.
- 10 tips on how to eat more calcium
  Reduce your intake of coffee, alcohol and soft drinks.
- Ageing - muscles bones and joints
  Exercise can prevent age-related changes to muscles, bones and joints and can reverse these changes too.
- Bone density testing
  Most procedures that measure bone density are quick and pain-free.
- Calcium
  If you don't have enough calcium in your diet, your bones will eventually become weak and brittle.
- Choosing the right shoe
  The right footwear can help keep your feet healthy, make your physical activity easier and help keep your body safe from injury.
- Posture
  Bad habits such as slouching and inactivity cause muscle fatigue and tension that ultimately lead to poor posture.
- Vitamin D
  A balanced approach to sunlight exposure will help you get enough vitamin D while protecting against skin cancer.
- Vitamin D - maintaining levels in winter (video)
  Vitamin D is important for healthy bones, muscles and the nervous system.

Bone and bone marrow conditions

- Acromegaly
  Acromegaly is caused by an excess of growth hormone in adults, which causes the overgrowth of bones in the face, hands, feet and internal organs.
- Amyloidosis
  A person with amyloidosis produces aggregates of insoluble protein that cannot be eliminated from the body.
- Bone cancer
  Bone cancer is a rare form of cancer that is treated with chemotherapy, radiotherapy or hormone therapy.
- Bone fractures
  Common sites for bone fractures include the wrist, ankle and hip.
- Fibrous dysplasia
  Fibrous dysplasia causes abnormal growth or swelling of bone, but it is not a form of cancer.
- Leukaemia
  Most children and many adults with acute leukaemia can expect to be cured, while chronic leukaemia can be successfully managed.
- McCune-Albright syndrome
  The severity of symptoms or how a child with McCune-Albright syndrome will be affected throughout life is difficult to predict.
- Multiple myeloma
Multiple myeloma is cancer of plasma cells in the bone marrow...

- **Osteomyelitis**
  Osteomyelitis means an infection of bone which can either be recent or longstanding...

- **Paget's disease of bone**
  Paget's disease of bone is a chronic condition that causes abnormal enlargement and weakening of bone...

- **Rib injuries**
  Rib injuries may include bruises, torn cartilage and bone fractures...

- **Rickets**
  Rickets is a preventable childhood bone disease caused by a lack of vitamin D...

- **Scoliosis**
  Scoliosis is an abnormal sideways curve of the spine...

- **Shin splints**
  'Shin splints' refers to pain felt anywhere along the shinbone from knee to ankle...

- **Treacher Collins syndrome**
  Treacher Collins syndrome is a genetic disorder that affects growth and development of the head, causing facial defects and hearing loss...

**Osteoporosis**

- **Menopause and osteoporosis**
  Regular weight-bearing exercise and maintaining a diet rich in calcium from childhood will help reduce bone loss at menopause...

- **Osteoporosis**
  A healthy, calcium-rich diet and regular physical activity throughout life can help prevent osteoporosis...

- **Osteoporosis and exercise**
  Exercise can reduce the risk of fractures resulting from osteoporosis by both slowing the rate of bone loss, and reducing the person’s risk of falling by building muscle strength and improving balance...

- **Osteoporosis in children**
  Osteoporosis in children is rare and usually caused by an underlying medical condition...

- **Osteoporosis in men**
  Up to 30 per cent of all fractures that occur in people with osteoporosis and osteopenia, occur in men...

**Muscle conditions**

- **Bell's palsy**
  The majority of people with Bell's palsy, around 90 per cent, will recover completely with time...

- **Helping a child with a disability with everyday activities**
  If you have a child with a disability you can help improve their communication and movement by encouraging them to take part in daily activities...

- **Multiple sclerosis (MS)**
  Multiple sclerosis is not contagious, but it is progressive and unpredictable...

- **Muscle cramp**
  A muscle cramp is an uncontrollable and painful spasm of a muscle...

- **Muscular dystrophy**
  People affected by muscular dystrophy have different degrees of independence, mobility and carer needs...

- **Myasthenia gravis**
  Myasthenia gravis is an autoimmune disease that causes muscle weakness...

- **Polymyositis**
  Polymyositis is hard to diagnose and may be mistaken for muscular dystrophy...
- Spinal muscular atrophy (SMA)
  A child with spinal muscular atrophy type 1 rarely lives beyond three years of age...
- Sprains and strains
  It is important to get the correct treatment for a sprain or strain as soon as possible after the injury to help you recover quickly...

Joint conditions

- Ankle sprains
  Ankle sprain is a common sports injury caused by overstretched and tearing the supporting ligaments...
- Ankylosing spondylitis
  Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) is a type of inflammatory arthritis that targets the joints of the spine...
- Arthritis explained
  People can manage their arthritis using medication, physiotherapy, exercise and self-management techniques...
- Baker’s cyst
  Baker’s cysts of the knee don’t always require active treatment and sometimes will only require observation by the treating doctor...
- Bursitis
  Bursitis is often caused by overuse and the inflammation will continue unless the particular activity or movement is stopped...
- Carpal tunnel syndrome
  Carpal tunnel syndrome can be caused by repetitive hand movements, pregnancy and arthritis...
- Developmental dysplasia of the hip (DDH)
  Around 95 per cent of babies born with developmental dysplasia of the hip can be successfully treated...
- Elbow pain
  Elbow pain can result from overuse in a range of sports or occupations...
- Hip disorders
  The hip joint is complicated to allow a wide range of motion while still supporting the weight of the body...
- Knee injuries
  Mild knee injuries may heal by themselves, but all injuries should be checked and diagnosed by a doctor or physiotherapist...
- Osgood-Schlatter syndrome
  Osgood-Schlatter syndrome is a painful knee condition that affects adolescents...
- Perthes’ disease
  Most children with Perthes’ disease eventually recover, but it can take anywhere from two to five years...
- Reactive arthritis
  Reactive arthritis is a form of arthritis that occurs as a result of some bacterial infections...

Hand and foot conditions

- Achilles tendonitis
  People who run regularly seem to be susceptible to Achilles tendonitis...
- Children’s feet and shoes
  A child learning to walk receives important sensory information from the soles of their feet, and shoes can make walking more difficult...
- Choosing the right shoe
  The right footwear can help keep your feet healthy, make your physical activity easier and help keep your body safe from injury...
- Cysts - ganglion cysts
  A ganglion cyst is the most common lump on the hand, and tends to target women between the ages of 20 and 40 years of age...
- Diabetes - foot care
Good foot care and regular check-ups can help people with diabetes avoid foot problems...

- **Dupuytren’s contracture**
  
  Dupuytren's contracture gradually causes clawing of the fingers as they are pulled towards the palm...

- **Feet - problems and treatments**
  
  Correctly fitted shoes help you avoid foot and leg pain or injury...

- **Foot care - podiatrists**
  
  Podiatrists can advise about how to choose the right shoes for your feet...

- **Foot odour - causes and cures**
  
  Even the most fastidiously clean people can suffer from foot odour...

- **Foot orthoses**
  
  People who have chronic foot or leg problems that interfere with their health may be prescribed orthoses by their podiatrist...

- **Foot problems - heel pain**
  
  The heel protects the structures of the foot, but heel pain is a common foot complaint...

- **Footwear for healthy feet**
  
  Wearing shoes that fit properly and support your feet is vital to avoid sore feet and to prevent or alleviate many common foot problems...

- **Left-handedness**
  
  If your child is naturally left-handed, don’t try to force them to use their right hand...

- **Raynaud’s phenomenon**
  
  Raynaud’s phenomenon can be a sign of a more serious underlying condition, so see your doctor if you experience it...

- **Sever’s disease**
  
  Sever’s disease is a common cause of heel pain, particularly in the young and physically active...

### Back neck and spine conditions

- **Back pain**
  
  Back pain is common. Some people will develop back pain that is persistent (lasts more than three months). There are many things that you can do to live well with back pain...

- **Back pain in children**
  
  Children with back pain may grow into adults with chronic bad backs, so it is important to encourage sensible back care...

- **Living with persistent pain**
  
  Pain is our built-in alarm system. It makes us aware that something might be going wrong in our body. However, there are many things you can do to deal effectively with persistent pain...

- **Neck pain**
  
  Treatments like physiotherapy, osteopathy or remedial massage can generally help neck and shoulder pain...

- **Scoliosis**
  
  Scoliosis is an abnormal sideways curve of the spine...

- **Shoulder pain**
  
  Shoulder pain is common in our community. The good news is that with appropriate treatment pain will improve so you can get back to doing the things you enjoy...

- **Tendonitis**
  
  Most cases of tendonitis recover completely, but severe untreated tendonitis can lead to rupture of the tendon...

- **Treating persistent pain**
  
  Pain is our built-in alarm system. It makes us aware that something might be going wrong in our body. However, there are many things you can do to deal effectively with persistent pain...

- **When do I need to see my doctor about persistent pain?**
Living with persistent pain isn’t easy. Your doctor can help you balance your pain, your treatment and hurdles you encounter in life...

Related Information

- **Perthes’ disease**
  Most children with Perthes’ disease eventually recover, but it can take anywhere from two to five years...

- **Baker’s cyst**
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- **Bursitis**
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- [Patient Information - Ganglion](#)

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