

Ganglia

Ganglia are swellings that occur around joints, the most common sites being the wrist and ankle.

What causes ganglia and who is at risk?

The origin of ganglia is uncertain but they are probably caused by a breakdown of synovial tissue. This is the specialised tissue that lines most joints. It is smooth and produces a fluid (synovial fluid) that lubricates the joint, allowing it to move freely. This synovial tissue also lines the sheaths that surround tendons.

Tendons are the tough, fibrous structures that connect muscles to bone. It is the breakdown of the synovial tissue of tendon sheaths that gives rise to most ganglia. This often occurs on its own but may be triggered by an injury.

lumps to arise on the body. They occur most commonly around the wrist but also along the fingers, around the ankle and on top of the foot. They are usually round in shape and vary in size from minute pin-head lumps affecting the fingers to pea-sized or larger lumps affecting the wrist or ankle.

They are firm and rubbery in texture and may move freely under the skin. They are usually painless but the tiny ganglia that affect the fingers may be very tender. They are filled with a jelly-like fluid and can slowly increase in size, but they only rarely become very large. As ganglia are completely harmless, the most common cause for concern is how they look.

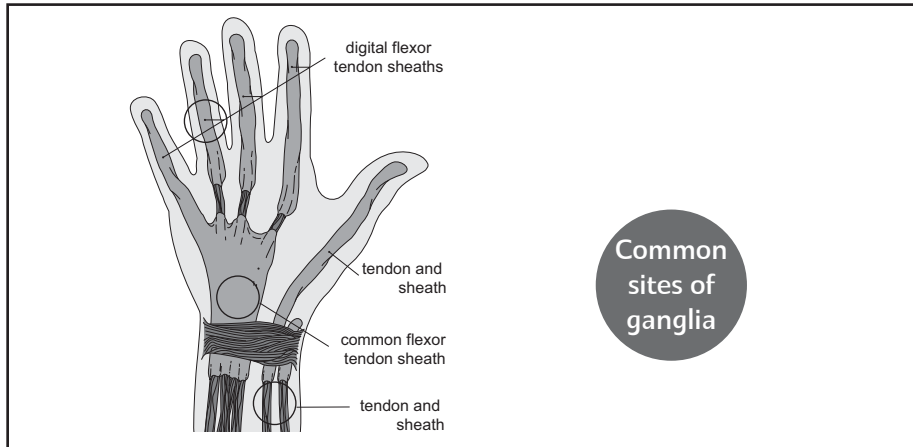
What are the common symptoms and complications of ganglia?

Ganglia are among the most common

What is the treatment for ganglia?

Ganglia may disappear spontaneously. As they are usually painless and

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completely harmless, most people once reassured will not require any specific treatment. If their cosmetic appearance is cause for concern or the ganglia are painful, they may be removed surgically in a simple operation.

Surgery is the only effective treatment for ganglia. Traditionally, ganglia were burst by hitting them with a heavy object, usually the family bible. Today, if they do not resolve spontaneously they can be removed surgically.

Usually, the operation will be performed as a day case. This means that you will be admitted to hospital but allowed to go home the same day. A general anaesthetic is most commonly used, which means that you will be put to sleep for the operation. You will not be allowed to eat or drink for six to eight hours before the operation.

If the ganglion is small or if you have a serious heart or lung condition, the operation can be performed under local

anaesthetic, in which case you will remain awake and you will not need to fast beforehand.

When you arrive at the hospital you will see a nurse or doctor who will ask you questions about your general health to make sure you are fit enough for the procedure. If you are undergoing a general anaesthetic, a doctor (often the anaesthetist) will examine your heart and lungs. You must tell the doctor if you have had any allergic reactions to drugs in the past. You will then be asked to sign a consent form stating that you understand the procedure and the risks involved.

If the operation is to be performed under general anaesthetic, you may be given a 'pre-med' injection beforehand. You should arrange to have someone to take you home if you have had a general anaesthetic as you will be a little drowsy for a few hours after the operation.

Complications of surgery

This is a simple and safe operation and complications are rare. If you have had a general anaesthetic, you may feel nauseous afterwards. Chest infections and thrombosis (blood clots in the legs) are possible complications of any general anaesthetic, but they are more likely if you smoke or are very overweight.

As with any operation there is the risk of infection and bleeding from the wound. Infection will cause increasing tenderness, redness and swelling of the wound site. You should consult your doctor immediately if this occurs. There will be some soreness and tenderness of the wound site for a few days after the operation and simple pain-killers such as paracetamol may be required.

If the operation has been performed on

your wrist and your job involves much hand work, you may need to take several days off work. You should use your hands normally during this period of time, even if this is a little uncomfortable, to prevent the affected wrist from becoming stiff. If non-dissolving stitches have been used, these will need to be removed by your GP after seven to 10 days.

What is the outcome of having a ganglion?

Ganglia often resolve on their own and so if not painful you may be best advised to wait and see. If you decide to go ahead with surgery, you should be aware that the ganglion may recur at the same site in the future, despite adequate removal.