

Mucous cysts

Information for patients

What are mucous cysts?

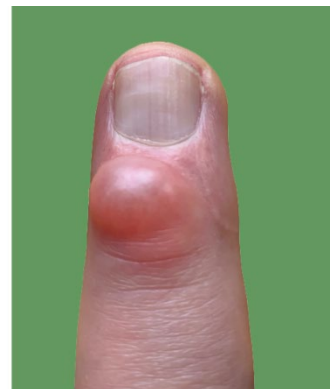
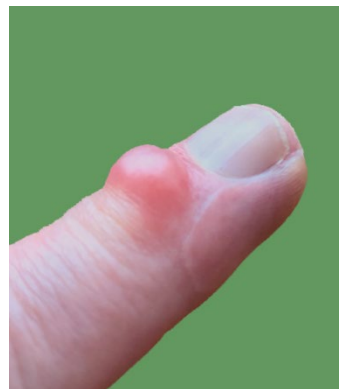
A mucous cyst is a ganglion affecting the small joints of the finger. They are small, bump-like swelling that can form, usually near the last joint (closest to your fingernail). These cysts often appear on the nail side of the finger and are filled with a jelly-like fluid. They are harmless, but they can be annoying and sometimes cause discomfort or make it hard to move your finger.

What causes mucous cysts?

Mucous cysts usually develop because of osteoarthritis in the finger joint. This is a condition that commonly affects the joints at the ends of the fingers (terminal finger joint arthritis). We don't really understand why these cysts develop, but although they may look strange, they are not dangerous or cancerous.

What do mucous cysts look and feel like?

- Found around the last joint of your finger, near to your nail
- Small and round, like a little bump near your joint
- Filled with clear, thick, harmless fluid
- Can be located near the base of your fingernail
- Sometimes they may make the nail look ridged or bumpy
- They can be tender or sore.



Do mucous cysts go away on their own?

Mucous cysts can often shrink and disappear on their own over time. The good news is that they don't necessarily need any treatment, especially if they're not causing too much trouble.

Do I need any treatment for my mucous cyst?

It is usually best to leave the cyst alone, unless it is causing significant symptoms.

Treatment is usually only offered if the cyst becomes significantly troublesome in terms of pain or repeated bursting.

There are always risks of treating these cysts with surgery.

First line treatments

If your mucous cyst is small, not painful, and not affecting the movement of your finger, we recommend trying some simple, non-surgical treatments. Here are a few ways you can manage it without surgery:

1. **Warm compresses**

Placing a warm, damp washcloth over the cyst for a few minutes a couple of times a day may help relieve any discomfort and keep the area flexible.

2. **Finger splinting**

If your finger is sore, a splint can help keep it still and reduce pain. This is helpful if the cyst is inflamed (swollen and tender). You can buy a splint online for <£10 or use a lolly stick with tape to keep the finger still overnight.

3. **Anti-inflammatory gels**

If the cyst is painful, you can use an anti-inflammatory gel, like ibuprofen or Voltarol gel, to help reduce swelling and pain.

4. **Keeping the area clean**

Since mucous cysts can occasionally pop on their own, it's important to keep the area clean to avoid infection. If the cyst does open, cover it with a clean bandage.

Never try to pop the cyst on purpose, as this can lead to infection or make the cyst worse.

When to see a doctor:

If the cyst is bothering you significantly enough to want further treatment, which may carry risks, then your GP can refer you to the hand surgery service.

If the cyst is bursting repeatedly, then there is a risk of infection if left alone; treatment may be offered if this is the case.

The surgery we offer is outlined below, with a discussion of benefits and risks of the operation.

Surgery for mucous cysts:

Surgery is done under local anaesthetic by numbing the whole finger. The operation is done as a day case procedure in an operating theatre. We may give you antibiotics before the operation. After the operation you will have a bandage on the finger for 2 weeks while the area heals. Stitches are usually removed at the 2-week stage at the hospital hand clinic.

What are the benefits of surgery?

- It can get rid of the cyst.

What are the risks of surgery:

- Infection – this can be a simple wound infection that can be treated with tablet antibiotics. However, there is a chance of developing a deep infection in the joint (septic arthritis) or the bone (osteomyelitis). Although this is rare it is a significant complication that needs further surgery and often antibiotics to be given into the veins for several weeks.
- Amputation – is a very rare risk, but has happened when it has been impossible to control infection caused by surgery.
- Stiffness – part of the surgery involves removing a small area of bone (osteophyte) from the joint that causes irritation.

- Recurrence – there is no guarantee that the cyst will not return over time due to the ongoing osteoarthritis.
- Nail deformity – surgery can alter the nail growth or result in a deformity to the nail.

What are the alternatives to surgery?

- Continue with first line treatments outlined above.

What if I do nothing (or don't have surgery)?

- Most cysts are completely harmless and will disappear on their own over time.
- If they repeatedly burst, there is a small chance of developing an infection in or around the joint, so these ones should be discussed with your GP for consideration of referral to the Hand Service.

Important things to remember

- Mucous cysts are not dangerous, and they don't turn into anything more serious.
- Non-surgical treatments can help reduce discomfort.
- Avoid popping or pressing on the cyst to prevent infection.

Resources:

Lothian Virtual Hand Clinic – Mucous cysts

<https://lothianvirtualhandclinic.co.uk/mucous-cysts/>



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BSSH – Terminal Finger Joint Arthritis

www.bssh.ac.uk/patients/conditions/23/terminal_finger_joint_arthritis



SCAN ME

BSSH – Ganglion cysts

www.bssh.ac.uk/patients/conditions/20/ganglion_cysts



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Lothian Virtual Hand Clinic – Having an operation on your hand or arm

<https://lothianvirtualhandclinic.co.uk/having-an-operation-on-your-hand-or-arm/>



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