

Lipoma

Information for patients

What is a lipoma?

A lipoma is a common, non-cancerous (benign) growth made up of fat cells. Lipomas are soft, moveable lumps that develop just under the skin. They are the most common type of soft tissue growth and can occur in people of any age, though they are more common in adults aged 40-60.

What causes lipomas?

The exact cause of lipomas is not fully understood. They may be related to:

- Genetic factors (they sometimes run in families)
- Minor injuries to the area
- Age-related changes in fat tissue.

What are the symptoms?

Lipomas typically:

- Feel soft and doughy to touch
- Move easily when pressed gently
- Are usually painless
- Grow slowly over months or years
- Range in size from 1-2cm to 10cm or more
- Most commonly occur on the shoulders, neck, back, arms, or thighs.

Occasionally, a lipoma may cause discomfort if it presses on nearby nerves or if it's in a location where it rubs against clothing.

How is a lipoma diagnosed?

Your doctor has arranged imaging studies (such as ultrasound, MRI, or CT scan) to examine your lump. These scans help to:

- Confirm the lump is made of fat tissue
- Determine the exact size and location
- Rule out other types of growths.

In most cases, the imaging findings are typical for a simple lipoma and no further tests are needed. Modern imaging techniques are very good at detecting different diagnoses, but no test is 100% perfect. The imaging has been reviewed by specialist radiologists experienced in looking for soft tissue abnormalities.

Do I need treatment?

Many lipomas do not require any treatment and can simply be monitored. Treatment may be considered if the lipoma:

- Is causing symptoms such as pain or discomfort
- Is growing larger
- Is in a location that affects your daily activities.

What treatment options are available?

Monitoring may be recommended if the lipoma is small and not causing symptoms as described above. Checking the area for changes and seeking repeat review by your GP should changes or concerns be noted.

Surgical removal is an option if intervention is needed. This is usually performed as a day-case procedure under local anaesthetic. The entire lipoma is removed through a surgical incision. If this is required then the wound typically heals within 1-2 weeks and you may have some temporary bruising and swelling. It is possible for the lipoma to return after removal. Confirmation of the diagnosis occurs after excision by the pathology team.

What should I do now?

If you have been advised that no further treatment is required:

- **You can continue with all your normal activities** - there are no restrictions.
- **Self-monitoring:** It's good practice to occasionally check the area for any changes. Become familiar with how it normally feels so you can notice if anything changes.
- **No routine follow-up is needed** with the Sarcoma Service. We are discharging you back to your GP's care.

When should I seek medical advice?

You should contact your GP if you notice:

Changes to your existing lipoma:

- Rapid growth (increasing noticeably in size over weeks to months)
- Becoming hard or firm
- Becoming painful
- Skin changes over the lump.

New lumps:

- Any new lumps anywhere on your body should always be checked by your GP
- While lipomas are common and benign, any new lump should be assessed.

Other concerns:

- If you have any worries about the lump or develop symptoms.

Key points to remember

- Lipomas are benign (non-cancerous) and very common
- They do not turn into cancer
- Many lipomas require no treatment
- Self-monitor for any changes and contact your GP if concerned
- If treatment is needed, surgical removal is usually straightforward and effective.

Contact information

If you have any concerns or questions about your lipoma, please contact:

- Your GP in the first instance
- The Bone and Sarcoma Service if specifically advised to do so.

This leaflet provides general information only. Always follow the specific advice given by your healthcare team.