

# Patient information

## Mucous Cyst

### What is a mucous cyst?

A mucous cyst is a ganglion that appears on the back of a finger or thumb, near the end joint (D.I.P. joint in the finger, I.P. joint in the thumb). A ganglion is collection of fluid arising from the nearby joint.

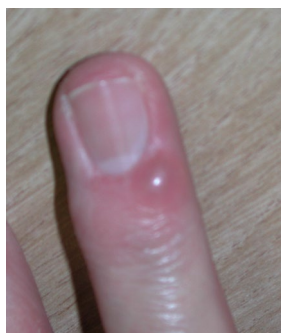


Photo of a Mucous Cyst



Illustration of a Mucous Cyst

### Why do they occur?

We don't know. All hand joints are filled with fluid. In some cases, the fluid can escape through a small hole in the joint capsule. It is like a valve, so the fluid can escape into the cyst, but cannot return to the joint. They are more common in people with some arthritis change in the joint.

### What symptoms do they cause?

There is typically a lump on one side of the end joint. It may get bigger or smaller with time. It may periodically discharge yellow sticky fluid. It may cause the nail to be deformed, as it presses on the nail bed.

### What treatments are possible?

Pricking the cyst is harmful, as it may introduce infection into the joint. The only treatment that may work is an operation. There are a number of side effects, so most people choose not to have surgery and to keep their mucous cyst.

### The operation - read about the risks of surgery before you decide

This takes about 20 minutes. We commonly do this under Local Anaesthetic (with some injections around the base of the finger). This is uncomfortable for the first minute, and then one gets used to the sensation. We often use a tourniquet, to reduce bleeding while we operate. We cut through the skin, avoiding the nail bed and the extensor tendon. We remove the cyst, and its stalk; this reduces the risk of it coming back. We also nibble out any spurs of bone and put in skin stitches.

## Main risks

Infection	This may be quite serious, as it can get into the joint, causing a “septic arthritis”. This causes painful stiffness of the joint. We occasionally have to fuse these joints to salvage septic arthritis.
Damage to the nerves	(rare) leading to numbness in part of the digit.
Stiffness	We encourage you to move all joints after the procedure.
Recurrence (30%)	Mucous cysts, or any ganglion, can come back, or another one can appear from the other side of the joint.
Scar sensitivity	Once the stitches are out, massaging the scar reduces this.
Complex Regional Pain Syndrome.	Pain and stiffness after hand surgery.
Nail bed damage	Leading to nail deformity.

## After surgery you must

- Exercise all the joints that you can.
- Keep your hand elevated until the swelling goes down.
- Keep moving the fingers.
- Remove the bulky bandage at two days, leaving a clean sticky plaster.
- Keep the hand dry until the stitches come out (usually 10 to 15 days).
- Once the stitches are out, you should massage the scar.

## Post-operative contacts:

- Conquest DSU Mon–Fri office hours 0300 131 4500 (ask for Richard Ticehurst ward)
- Eastbourne DSU Mon-Fri 8am-6pm 0300 131 4500 (Day Surgery Unit)
- Eastbourne Orthopaedics outpatients matron 0300 131 4576

## How can I prepare for surgery?

It is important to prepare for an operation to reduce the risks of complications. You should stop smoking, do some exercise, eat healthily and prepare for the phase after surgery. Fruit, vegetables and protein help wound healing. There is information about how to do prepare at: <https://www.cpoc.org.uk/patients>.

## Important information

The information in this leaflet is for guidance purposes only and is not provided to replace professional clinical advice from a qualified practitioner.

It is important to prepare for an operation to reduce the risks of complications. There is information about how to do this at: <https://www.cpoc.org.uk/patients>.

## Your comments

We are always interested to hear your views about our leaflets. If you have any comments, please contact the patient experience team on 0300 131 4784 or [esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.patientexperience@nhs.net).

## Hand hygiene

We are committed to maintaining a clean, safe environment. Hand hygiene is very important in controlling infection. Alcohol gel is widely available at the patient bedside for staff use and at the entrance of each clinical area for visitors to clean their hands before and after entering.

## Other formats

**If you require any of our leaflets in alternative formats, such as large print or alternative languages, please contact the Equality and Human Rights Department on 0300 131 4434 or [esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net](mailto:esh-tr.AccessibleInformation@nhs.net)**

After reading this information are there any questions you would like to ask? Please list below and ask your nurse, doctor or practitioner.

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## Reference

The following clinicians have been consulted and agreed this patient information:

Prof Scarlett McNally	Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon
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Mr Hemant Thakral	Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon

The directorate group that has agreed this patient information leaflet:  
Diagnostic, Anaesthetic and Surgery

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Responsible Clinician: Prof Scarlett McNally, Consultant Orthopaedic Surgeon

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