

Patient information

Ganglion surgery

You will be admitted for surgery because of a ganglion. Ganglions are small collections of fluid seen normally around the hand or wrist or the back of the foot. The fluid collection is caused by an underlying irritation either to the tendons or to the joints underneath. Because of the irritation, fluid is produced. This fluid will very often work its way up towards the surface collecting in a little sac, a so-called ganglion. The ganglion itself may be unsightly but rarely causes any symptoms. Any aches or pains from the site are normally caused by the underlying irritation of the joints or tendon.

Treatment

Some ganglions disappear of their own accord or when resting the extremity. On other occasions treatment is required. Occasionally, under sterile conditions, a cannula is inserted into the ganglion and the ganglion is aspirated. When doing this the doctor normally makes multiple puncture holes in the ganglion sac in order to encourage it to scar up and thereby avoid a recurrence. On the whole, 25% of ganglions recur following 2-3 aspirations.

Surgical treatment

Where a ganglion is not successfully treated non-operatively, surgery may be required. This also applies to ganglions located close to large vessels where aspiration is normally not attempted. At surgery a small incision is made over the ganglion and the ganglion sac is removed. This operation is done in a general or local anaesthetic depending on the location of the ganglion.

Post-operative regime

Following the operation the wound is closed with a suture which will remain in place for 10-12 days. If the surgery has taken place to the hand, the hand should be kept in a sling or rested for 24-48 hours. One is encouraged to move the shoulder, elbow and fingers regularly to reduce any swelling of the hand. Where surgery takes place to the foot, one is encouraged to sit with the foot elevated or when lying down place the foot on a pillow in order to reduce the swelling.

The dressing should be left intact for at least 48 hours following surgery. At this stage it may be removed. When the wound is dry, it may be washed or showered.

Complications

1. Pain

There will always be a certain amount of discomfort following surgery, but this will normally settle down within a couple of weeks. There will always be some discomfort or pain from the operation site – particularly noticeable when using tools or lifting pots and pans. These symptoms may last for several months. Painkillers as prescribed should be taken.

2. Infection

Infections are uncommon. A superficial infection may occur and this is associated with a slight seepage from the wound and an unpleasant smell. Normally such an infection will settle down following change of the dressing and cleaning of the wound. Rarely antibiotic treatment is required to treat an infection. If an infection is suspected medical advice should be sought.

Occasionally a small superficial nerve to the skin near the ganglion is damaged. As a result, there may be a small area of numbness at the site of the scar.

Often a small amount of bleeding is seen from the wound. This can be counteracted by elevating the hand or foot or by applying moderate pressure on the top of the dressing. If bleeding should continue medical advice should be sought.

3. Recurrence

Ganglions frequently recur even following surgery. There is overall a 25% chance of recurrence following surgery.

4. Outcome

As stated above there is a 25% recurrence chance of the ganglion. It is very rare that further surgical procedures are required since these also have a 25% recurrence risk.

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