

Ganglion Cyst

What You Need to Know

What Is a Ganglion Cyst?

A ganglion cyst is a benign (non-cancerous) fluid-filled lump that most commonly appears on the back of the wrist, the palm side of the wrist, or at the base of a finger. Ganglion cysts are the most common soft-tissue masses of the hand and wrist, accounting for approximately 60–70% of all hand and wrist lumps. They are filled with thick, gel-like fluid that originates from a nearby joint or tendon sheath — essentially a balloon that fills from the joint capsule or tendon covering.

Despite their often alarming appearance, ganglion cysts are benign and are not a sign of cancer or serious disease. They can, however, cause pain, interfere with wrist range of motion, and be cosmetically bothersome.

What Does It Feel Like?

- A smooth, round, firm or rubbery lump — most often on the back of the wrist
- The lump may vary in size — fluctuating over days or weeks, sometimes disappearing and returning
- Pain or aching — particularly with wrist extension (bending the wrist back) or repetitive motion
- Tenderness when the cyst presses on nearby nerves or tendons
- Weakness in grip if a tendon sheath is involved
- Many ganglion cysts are entirely painless — discovered incidentally

What Causes Ganglion Cysts?

- The exact cause is not fully understood — often associated with joint irritation or prior injury
- Repetitive wrist use or prior wrist trauma can contribute
- More common in women aged 20–40
- Often arise from the scapholunate ligament (back of the wrist) or the radioscaphoid joint (palm side)

How Is It Treated?

- Observation — many ganglion cysts resolve on their own (estimated 40–58% spontaneous resolution)
- Activity modification — reducing the aggravating wrist movements
- Aspiration — draining the cyst with a needle (high recurrence rate, but non-surgical)
- Surgical excision — removing the cyst along with its root from the joint; lower recurrence rate
- PT post-aspiration or surgery: restoring wrist motion, strength, and function

When Should I Be Concerned?

- Rapid increase in size
- New numbness or tingling — nerve compression by the cyst
- Significant pain limiting daily activities

The Good News

Ganglion cysts are benign and very manageable. Many resolve without any treatment. When treatment is needed, aspiration and surgical excision are both effective options. Physical therapy helps restore full wrist function after any procedure.

Ganglion cysts are benign and many resolve on their own — treatment is only needed when the cyst is painful or limiting function.

This information is for general educational purposes only and is not a substitute for a professional evaluation. Call us today — we have immediate openings with no waitlist.

Call (781) 769-2040 • Book online at www.ptandsr.com