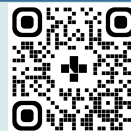


Your Journey with a Ganglion Cyst on Your Hand or Wrist



For more information scan this QR code or go to myhealth.alberta.ca/ganglion-cyst-pathway

Warning: Any new lump or bump on your body should be evaluated by a healthcare provider. This pathway resource is for those patients who have been diagnosed with a ganglion cyst on their hand or wrist.

A ganglion cyst is a type of soft tissue mass most commonly found on the hands and wrists, though they can also grow on other parts of the body, like your feet, ankles, knees, or shoulders. Ganglion cysts may appear suddenly, and they can be present for months to years. They are not cancerous. **Most ganglion cysts are painless, will go away on their own, and do not require treatment.**

You are the most important part of your healthcare team. This guide will help you to know what to expect as you work with your team to manage and treat a ganglion cyst on your hand or wrist. If you have any questions along the way, please ask your healthcare team. Click on the page numbers in blue if you want more information about the step in your journey.



Visit your healthcare provider ([page 6](#))

- Take note of changes in how your hands or wrists look.
- Share all your symptoms and concerns. Your health includes physical, emotional, spiritual, financial, and social elements.
- To better manage your health condition, your healthcare providers need to hear from you and understand who you are and what matters to you.
- Consider bringing a family member or friend to support you.
- Most ganglion cysts can be diagnosed through an exam by your healthcare provider. They will examine the hand or wrist changes you have identified.



Get your tests ([page 8](#))

- Your healthcare provider may ask you to go for an ultrasound or x-ray only if they can't easily tell the change is a ganglion cyst.



Review your test results ([page 8](#))

- If you do have an ultrasound or x-ray of your hand or wrist, you may find your test results on MyHealth Records or MyChart (myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords or ahs.ca/mychart), or ask your provider to print them for you.
- Talk with your healthcare provider so you know what your test and assessment results mean and how they will help your team and you decide what to do next.



Review your treatment and management options ([page 9](#))

- Most ganglion cysts will go away on their own without any treatment.
- If your ganglion cyst isn't painful and doesn't impact how you use your hands or wrists, your healthcare team may suggest that you keep monitoring the cyst and return to see them if there are any changes or if you are concerned.
- In specific cases, you may be referred to a specialist to have the fluid in the ganglion cyst drained (aspiration) or to be assessed for surgery.
- Decide with your healthcare provider what will work best for you.



Start your treatment and watch your symptoms ([page 11](#))

- Write down any changes you notice in your symptoms.



Keep taking care of yourself ([page 12](#))

- Keep taking care of your overall health.
- Look for other healthy lifestyle resources and supports.



Important Tips:

Need to connect with a primary care clinic?
ahs.ca/findadoctor

Need a translator or interpreter? Let your healthcare provider know

Need health advice?
Call Health Link at 811

Need to find programs and resources in your community?
Call 211 or visit ab.211.ca



Primary Care
Alberta

How to use this resource

The information provided in this resource is based on validated evidence from a variety of sources, including healthcare professionals in Alberta, peer-reviewed journals, current clinical guidelines, validated patient resources, and specialty care recommendations. It is intended as general health information and should not replace the clinical judgment or advice of qualified healthcare providers. This resource does not address the unique needs of individual patients. Always consult with your healthcare team and follow their recommendations for your specific care.

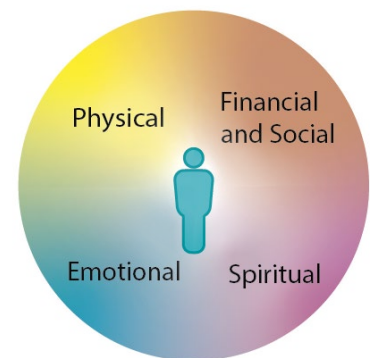
These pages are for you to use as needed. You can look through all of them at once or just the ones that help you now. Feel free to come back to the resource whenever you need it.

Whole-person health

The whole-person health approach will help you and your healthcare providers better manage your health condition. It is drawn from the teachings of the medicine wheel.

Whole-person health means thinking about all parts of your health and wellness: physical, financial and social, spiritual, and emotional. All of these parts are connected and influence each other. It's important to be aware of your personal needs in each part and to share that information with your healthcare providers.

- **Physical:** your specific health conditions and how well your body works
- **Financial and Social:** your ability to meet your housing, transportation, food, and health needs, feeling supported to manage your daily life, and having meaningful relationships
- **Spiritual:** your beliefs, sense of connection, and purpose
- **Emotional:** how you think, feel, and cope with life events



Whole-person health

Whole-person health also reminds us that we are all connected and work together: you, your support systems, and your healthcare providers. Your healthcare providers could be your doctor, nurse practitioner, or a team that comes together with you to plan and organize your care.

Your healthcare providers need to understand who you are and what matters to you. This helps to build trust. But it can be hard to know what to share or what to say. Try starting by asking yourself:

“What are the things in my life that are important to me?”

“What are the things in my life that may be affecting my health and well-being?”



Bringing forward what matters to you is important. Here are some examples of things you may want to talk about with your healthcare providers:

Physical

“My symptoms are making it hard for me to do my job.”

“Because of my pain and how hard it is for me to use my hand, it’s difficult to take care of myself.”

“My ganglion cyst is painful and is stopping me from doing some of the activities I enjoy.”

Financial and Social

“I’m worried I won’t be able to get to all of my appointments.”

“I need my daughter with me as a translator.”

“I’m not sure how I will pay for my medications this month.”

“If I need surgery, will I need to miss any work as I recover?”

Emotional

“I’m lonely and have no one to talk to.”

“I have a lot of stress and I’m not sure how to manage it.”

“I do not like the look of the ganglion cyst on my wrist.”

Spiritual

“It’s important that I follow traditional healing practices.”

“It’s important that my religious practice of fasting is respected and brought into my care.”

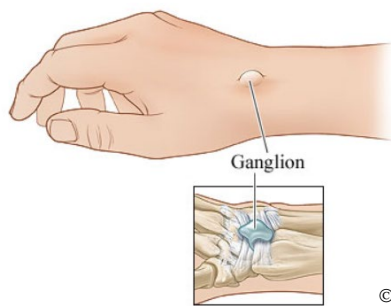
What is a ganglion cyst?

Warning: Any new lump or bump on your body should be evaluated by a healthcare provider. This pathway resource is for anyone who has been diagnosed with a ganglion cyst on their hand or wrist.

A ganglion cyst is a type of soft tissue mass that most commonly occurs on the hands and wrists. They can also grow on other parts of the body, like your feet, ankles, knees, or shoulders. This pathway resource will focus on ganglion cysts on the hands and wrists.

Ganglion cysts are not cancerous (they are called benign growths).

Ganglion cysts are usually round, smooth, firm, rubbery, and slightly moveable. They are filled with a jelly-like fluid called synovial fluid. Synovial fluid helps lubricate your joints so that they can move smoothly.



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A ganglion cyst can grow out of a:

- Joint capsule: The area around a joint (where 2 bones come together).
- Tendon sheath: The tissue that covers a tendon. A tendon is a fiber that connects bones to muscles.

Ganglion cysts may appear suddenly, and they can be very small or can be bigger than a cherry. You may notice that your ganglion cyst gets larger with certain activities as fluid builds up in the sac, but growth is usually slow and continued growth is uncommon. Ganglion cysts can also get smaller on their own and more than half go away on their own within a year.

Anyone can get a ganglion cyst, although they are not usually seen in children. The exact cause of ganglion cysts is unknown, but risk factors include:

- Female sex
- Being young to middle aged
- History of hand and wrist injury
- Overuse or repetitive motions of the hands and wrists (for example, sports, work activities, gardening, knitting)
- A common type of ganglion is called a **mucous cyst**. These are associated with osteoarthritis in the fingers. Mucous cysts usually occur in the joint closest to the fingernail.

Ganglion cysts do not usually cause any symptoms, but discuss with your healthcare providers if you notice:

- Pain: Ganglion cysts are usually painless or may cause mild discomfort (for example, they can be tender to the touch). Pain may get worse with activity or pressure.
- Range of motion or strength impacts: Ganglion cysts do not usually impact the way that you are able to use your hands and wrists but can weaken your grip or affect joint motion.

Ganglion cysts can occur in different places on your hands and wrists:

- A. Dorsal wrist ganglion (back of wrist): Ganglion cysts occur most often on the back side of the wrist. These ganglion cysts can be aspirated (fluid from the ganglion cyst is drained with a needle), but only with significant symptoms.
- B. Volar wrist ganglion (palm side of wrist): The next most common place for a ganglion cyst to appear is on the palm side of the wrist. These types of ganglion cysts should not be aspirated.
- C. Volar retinacular cyst (base of finger): These ganglion cysts occur on the palm side of the fingers. These types of ganglion cysts should only be aspirated by a specialist.
- D. Digital mucous cyst (finger): These ganglion cysts occur on the fingers, close to the fingernail. They should not be aspirated.

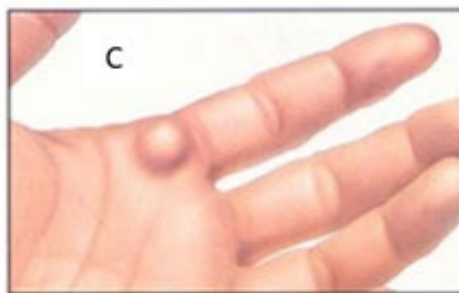
A ganglion cyst can occur...



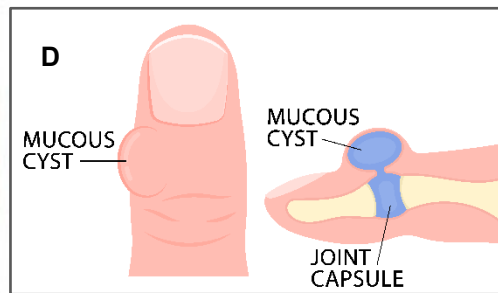
...on the **back of the wrist**.



...on the **palm side of the wrist**.



...at the **base of a finger**.



...or close to a **fingernail**.

ABC: Image adapted from Veterans Health Library

D: Image from Shutterstock



Visit your healthcare provider

Everyone who experiences a ganglion cyst will have their own unique journey. How you move through your journey, the number of visits with your healthcare providers, the steps you will take, and the order you take them in will depend on your individual needs. Decisions are made in partnership with your healthcare providers. Always follow the specific recommendations from your healthcare providers.

Here are a few tips to help you get ready for appointments with your healthcare providers:

- Consider using a symptom tracker to write down important information to share with your healthcare providers about your symptoms and what you have noticed about your ganglion cysts.
- A symptom tracker can help you remember what symptoms you're feeling, how often they happen, and what makes them better or worse.
- Write down a list of your questions and concerns. When you're done, read your list and mark the most important things.
- Make a list of the prescription and non-prescription (over-the-counter) medicines you use, including any vitamins, herbs, and supplements.
- Ask someone you trust to go with you to your appointment. They can help you ask questions, write down instructions, and remember explanations.



Helpful tools and resources

- Use a **symptom tracker**: hqa.ca/symptom-tracker (Health Quality Alberta)
- To get the most out of your visit, plan to write notes during the visit or see the Alberta Health Services **My Care Conversations app** (ahs.ca/careapp) website for more information about recording your conversation with your healthcare provider.

Healthcare provider's assessment

Most ganglion cysts can be diagnosed after an examination by your healthcare provider. They will look at the cyst and at the outside of your hand and wrist, looking at any changes you have identified.

Your healthcare provider will review your history. This may include questions about:

- Has the look of the ganglion cyst changed over time? Has it gotten bigger or smaller?
- Are there certain activities that make your symptoms worse? Does anything make the ganglion cyst bigger or smaller?
- Do you have any pain or tenderness?
- Is the ganglion cyst impacting how you use your hands and wrists (for example, your ability to participate in activities you enjoy or do your job)?



What should I watch for (symptoms of concern)?

Contact your healthcare provider if you notice:

- your ganglion cyst is growing consistently
- you have increasing pain
- the skin on the hand or wrist around the lump becomes red and warm

What should I share with my healthcare providers?

- The impact the ganglion cyst is having on things that are important to you, like your job, hobbies and interests, and relationships.
- What types of things help you work better with your healthcare providers and what do you expect and need from this relationship?

There are lots of things in your life that can impact your ability to manage your health, like:

- Problems with money, housing, and access to transportation
- Alcohol or drug use
- Not enough support or help
- Childhood experiences

It's important to talk about these things with your healthcare providers because they all play a role in your health and well-being.

You are the most important part of your healthcare team.

If you don't understand what your healthcare providers are telling you, let them know right away. Be open and honest. You might say:

"This is new to me. Could you please explain it slowly, using language that is easier to understand?"

"It sounded like you said that I should... Did I understand that correctly?"

"Can you show me a picture or model to help me understand?"



Helpful tools and resources

- Making the most of your appointment:
myhealth.alberta.ca/health/pages/conditions.aspx?Hwid=hw226888
- Working with your healthcare providers: hqa.ca/info (Health Quality Alberta)



Get your tests

Ultrasound

If there is a question about whether the lump or bump is a ganglion cyst or another condition, your healthcare provider may order an [ultrasound](#). For an ultrasound, a gel is placed on the wrist and a device is used to touch and scan the area.

X-ray

Your healthcare providers may ask you to get an x-ray of your hand and wrist only if they can't easily tell the lump or bump is a ganglion cyst. Knowing this information will help your healthcare providers determine the best treatment plan for you.



Review your test results

It is important to know what your test results are and what they mean for you personally. Take time to discuss your results with your healthcare providers. Medical terms can be hard to understand. And even common words like “positive” or “negative” might mean something different for medical tests. Ask your healthcare providers for explanations and examples to make sure you fully understand.

You might ask:

“What does this mean for me?”

“Is there a current concern? If so, what is it?”



Helpful tools and resources

You may find some of your results and health information using secure online tools:

MyHealth Records

See your lab results, immunizations, and some other results with a MyHealth Records account. Sign up at myhealth.alberta.ca/myhealthrecords.

MyChart

See your health information, manage your Alberta Health Services appointments, and interact directly with some members of your healthcare team. Learn more at ahs.ca/mychart.





Review your treatment and management options

Ganglion cysts usually do not need treatment. Most ganglion cysts will go away on their own within a year. You may need treatment if your ganglion cyst causes pain or other symptoms.

Aspiration

In specific cases, your healthcare provider may refer you to have the fluid in your ganglion cyst drained with a needle (this is called aspiration). Aspiration can be tried up to 3 times and may be done with or without an ultrasound.

Aspiration may make your ganglion cyst smaller or may get rid of it completely.

If significant symptoms do not go away after 3 aspirations, or if aspiration cannot be completed (like because of the type of ganglion cyst you have), you may be referred to a specialist.

Surgery

In selective cases, you and your healthcare team may consider surgery to remove your ganglion cyst.

Ganglion cysts are **not removed** for cosmetic reasons.

If you are referred, the specialist will meet with you to discuss your health concerns, examine your hands, and discuss treatment options with you.

You can find out more about the referral criteria for a specialist by asking your healthcare providers.

It is not uncommon for ganglion cysts to come back after aspiration or surgery.



Helpful tools and resources

To learn about how to prepare for your specialist appointment, check out the QuRE Patient and Caregiver Journal by visiting ahs.ca/qure.

Other information

- Do not try to smash a ganglion cyst with a book or other heavy object. You may break a bone or otherwise injure your wrist, and the ganglion cyst may return anyway.
- Do not poke the ganglion cyst with a pin or another sharp object to drain the fluid. You could cause an infection by doing this.
- If your ganglion cyst breaks open on its own and the skin is broken, keep it clean and dry.



Asking the following questions can help you make an informed decision about your different treatment options and decide which ones will work best for you:

“What are the advantages and disadvantages of each option?”

“Can I use any of these options together?”

“How will this make me feel? Will it have side effects?”

“What results can I expect?”





Start your treatment and watch your symptoms

Monitor your ganglion cyst. Call your healthcare providers or Health Link at 811 if you have any concerns. You might feel like you don't want to bother your healthcare providers, but no detail is too small to share. If it matters to you, it will matter to your healthcare providers.

You can clarify with your healthcare providers what to expect in terms of follow-up communication. Connect with your healthcare providers whenever:

- You have questions
- Your ganglion cyst is growing consistently
- You have increasing pain
- The skin on the hand or wrist around the lump becomes red and warm
- You haven't gotten test results or heard back about an appointment in the time you had agreed to



Helpful tools and resources

If you can't reach your healthcare providers and need health advice or information, call Health Link anytime, day or night, by dialing **811**.





Keep taking care of yourself

Supporting whole-person health is important at all times. Many resources are available to help you.



Helpful tools and resources

Find programs and resources in your community:

211 connects Albertans to the programs and resources they need, anytime, day or night. Whether you're looking for help with mental health, financial assistance, basic needs or other challenges, 211 is here to help you find supports. It's free, confidential, and available in over 170 languages by phone, making it easy to access help when you need it. To connect with **211 Alberta**:

- Call 211
- Text INFO to 211
- Chat or search at ab.211.ca

The **Alberta Healthy Living Program** offers free workshops, classes, and supervised exercise and nutrition services to adults living with a variety of chronic conditions and diseases. Many education classes and workshops are available provincewide. Learn more by visiting ahs.ca/ahlp.

Chronic disease management support: ahs.ca/cdm

Health information and tools: myhealth.alberta.ca/Pages/HealthInfoToolsDefault.aspx



Resources

There are lots of resources out there, and it can be confusing to know what information is accurate and true. Here are some great resources that may be helpful for you.

Get help now:

- **Emergency: Call 911**
- Health Link: Call 811

Mental health, addiction, and crisis support:

- 811 or [Addiction Helpline](#): 1-866-332-2322
- 811 or [Mental Health Helpline](#): 1-877-303-2642
- Crisis Text Line: Text CONNECT to 741741
- Crisis Services Canada: Call 988, or visit [988.ca](#)
- Office of Mental Health Patient Advocates: [alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates](#)

Helpful tip

If you can't print this resource at home, ask a family member, friend, or your healthcare provider to print it for you. You can also use a computer and printer at your local library.

Community and social supports:

- 211 Alberta: Call 211, or visit [ab.211.ca](#)
- Family Violence Info Line: 310-1818, or visit [alberta.ca/family-violence-find-supports](#)
- Income Support: 1-866-644-5135, or visit [alberta.ca/income-support](#)

Alberta Health Services programs:

- Home Care: [ahs.ca/homecare](#)
- Find a Dietitian: [ahs.ca/nutrition](#)
 - Health Link has dietitians to answer nutrition questions. Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete the self-referral form on [ahs.ca/811](#).
- Spiritual Care Services: [ahs.ca/spiritualcare](#)

Primary care (family doctors and nurse practitioners):

- Find a doctor or nurse practitioner: [ahs.ca/findadoctor](#)
- Virtual care guide: [ahs.ca/virtualhealth](#)

Patient concerns and feedback:

- Office of Alberta Health/Mental Health Patient Advocates: [alberta.ca/office-of-alberta-health-advocates](#)
 - Offers coaching to help you advocate for yourself in the health system, and support to learn how the health system works and how to navigate through it.
- Alberta Health Services Patient Relations: 1-855-550-2555, or visit [ahs.ca/patientfeedback](#)



Important phone numbers

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Name or clinic name:

Phone number:

Notes

Use this space to take notes.

About this Pathway

The Provincial Pathways Unit co-developed this patient pathway in partnership with:

- Plastic surgery hand and wrist surgeons
- Orthopedic hand and wrist surgeons
- Primary care providers including physicians and nurse practitioners
- Patient and Family Advisors
- Alberta Health Services professionals

It is current as of August 2025.

Authors & Conflict of Interest Declaration

This pathway was reviewed and revised by a multi-disciplinary co-design team including specialists and primary care providers from across Alberta. Membership available on request by emailing albertapathways@primarycarealberta.ca.

Pathway Review Process

Patient pathways undergo scheduled review every three years, or earlier if there is a clinically significant change in knowledge or practice. The next scheduled review is August 2028. However, we welcome feedback at any time. Please send us your [feedback here](#).

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Disclaimer

This pathway represents evidence-based best practice but does not override the individual responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to their patients using their own clinical judgment given their patients' specific clinical conditions, in consultation with patients/alternate decision makers. The pathway is not a substitute for clinical judgment or advice of a qualified healthcare professional. It is expected that all users will seek advice of other appropriately qualified and regulated healthcare providers with any issues transcending their specific knowledge, scope of regulated practice or professional competence.