



What is a Mucous Cyst?

A mucus cyst is a common type of ganglion arising from the back of the end joint of the finger. It occurs because of some underlying arthritis in the end joint. A small spur of bone may irritate the joint tissue and a ganglion appears. This ganglion, or mucus cyst, is filled with clear sticky fluid. It usually appears as a lump next to the finger nail. Because of its size and position it may cause a groove to form in the nail. These cysts often fluctuate in size and may be painful. Sometimes the joint underneath the cyst is also painful due to the arthritis.

The skin over these cysts is often very thin and may spontaneously break and the cyst discharges and the pain temporarily improves. Unfortunately the cyst will often recur because the underlying arthritis is still present. There is a risk of infection when this cyst breaks that may get into the joint causing a septic arthritis. Sometimes the cysts spontaneously disappear.



How are mucous cysts treated?

Resting the finger with a splint and anti-inflammatory medications may help reduce the pain from the cyst or the underlying arthritis but may not lead to a long term cure. Aspirating or puncturing the cyst may lead to a temporary improvement but the cyst will often recur. There is also a risk of infection if the cyst is punctured or spontaneously ruptures. If this occurs then the wound must be treated with antiseptic and if it does not improve over 1-2 days then you should see your doctor.

Surgery to remove the cyst is very reliable as this also removes the underlying bone spur that causes the cyst in the first place. This is done under local anaesthetic and as a day case procedure. If there is an associated nail deformity then this will usually improve as the nail grows.

It is important to realize that some of the pain in the finger joint may be due to the underlying arthritis and not just the cyst. You should discuss this with your doctor to understand the possible results of any surgery.