

HAND LUMPS

“Lumps and bumps” of various kinds are extremely common on the hand. They may vary from benign cysts and growths that are simply unsightly to malignant tumours that require urgent treatment. The vast majority are benign. The experienced hand surgeon will often be able to make an accurate diagnosis from the history given by the patient and examination of the swelling. Additional investigations such as X-rays or scans may be needed. Examination of a tissue sample under the microscope will provide the final diagnosis.



Lumps may arise from any of the soft tissues (skin, muscle, blood vessels, nerves, fat) or bones. Fortunately the vast majority on the hand are benign. The most common are (i) ganglion, (ii) mucous cyst, (iii) giant cell tumour, (iv) inclusion dermoid (v) lipoma and (vi) conditions that mimic tumours such as Dupuytren's contracture (figure). The majority can be cured by simple removal but this can be difficult for a variety of reasons. Lumps can lie close to important structures in the hand, such as nerves and blood vessels, which must be identified and carefully protected during the operation.

The hand will be dressed with a supportive dressing that permits finger movement and light hand use. You will be discharged with specific instructions relating to hand exercises and wound care. Timing of your return to work is variable according to the operation and your occupation and you should discuss this. Your stitches will be dissolving by about two weeks after your operation. There are a number of recognised complications that can occur after this type of surgery.

Wound Possible problems include swelling, bruising, bleeding, blood collection under the wound (haematoma), infection and splitting of the wound (dehiscence).

Scar You will have a scar, which will be firm to touch and tender for some months. This can be helped by firm massage with the moisturizing cream.

Stiffness This can occur if the hand is not used and exercised after the operation.

Regional pain syndrome About 5% (1 in 20) of people are sensitive to hand surgery and their hand may become swollen, painful and stiff after the operation. This problem cannot be predicted, is variable in severity and is principally treated with physiotherapy.

Recurrence Some lumps can return after being removed.

Nerve Nerve damage can occur during your surgery which results in *either* a painful spot in the scar (neuroma) *or* some loss of feeling in the hand. This complication is very rare but may require a further operation to correct.

Artery Lumps on the front of the wrist are often very close to major arteries. Damage to the arteries is very rare and can be immediately repaired.

Nail Lumps on the tip of the finger often cause a groove in the nail. It usually settles after the operation but occasionally it can persist after or result from the surgery.