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MUCOUS CYST

This leaflet provides general information to help you understand mucous cysts and the available treatment options.

Not everyone with a mucous cyst needs surgery.

At the heart of my practice is **Shared Decision-Making**. Whether we pursue conservative management (Plan A) or surgical intervention (Plan B), the goal is to create a tailored treatment plan that aligns with your lifestyle, values, and functional goals.



This leaflet provides general information and does not replace individual medical advice.

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The Anatomy of a Mucous Cyst

A mucous cyst forms near the joint closest to the fingertip, relying on several structures working together:

How a Cyst Forms

It is an out-pouching of the joint:

- Forms at the last finger joint (the DIP joint)
- The joint lining balloons out into a small sac
- A one-way valve lets it fill with fluid



The Fluid

The sac holds thick, jelly-like fluid that normally lubricates and nourishes the joint — it is not cancerous.

The Link with Arthritis

Mucous cysts go hand in hand with wear:

- Usually seen with osteoarthritis of the joint
- Bone spurs form at the worn joint
- Pressure pushes fluid into the sac
- The cyst sits just under the skin

Effects on the Nail

- A groove can form in the nail
- The skin over the cyst may thin
- The finger can look deformed
- Several fingers can be affected

The Result

Many cause only a small lump, but some are painful, deform the nail or thin the skin, and occasionally drain fluid on their own.

What Is a Mucous Cyst?

A mucous cyst is a fluid-filled sac that usually forms near the joint closest to the fingertip (the DIP joint). It is linked to osteoarthritis and holds thick, jelly-like fluid, and it can sometimes deform the nail or drain on its own.

Common Features

Typically it appears as:

- A small lump just under the skin near the nail
- A groove or ridge in the nail beyond it
- Thin, shiny skin over the top

Why It Happens

It is closely linked to joint wear:

- Osteoarthritis of the fingertip joint
- Bone spurs around the worn joint
- A one-way valve trapping fluid
- Pressure within the joint

Symptoms and Examination

Symptoms

- A visible small lump on the finger near the nail
- Pain in the cyst or the underlying joint
- A groove in the nail or thinning skin

Diagnosis

- Usually a clinical diagnosis from examination
- X-ray often used to assess the arthritis

Examination

- The cyst and nearby joint are examined
- The skin over the cyst is checked
- Signs of arthritis in the joint assessed

Treatment Options: A Shared Decision

I will discuss all available treatment options with you, explaining the benefits and risks of each. Your preferences, values, and lifestyle will be considered as we work together to create a treatment plan best suited to your needs — **this shared decision-making process ensures you are fully informed and involved in your care.**

Treatment Depends On

- Whether the cyst is painful or deforming
- The state of the skin over the cyst
- How much arthritis is in the joint
- Your preferences and goals

Good News

Mucous cysts are not harmful and many need no treatment — if it isn't painful or breaking down the skin, doing nothing is always an option.

Plan A — Non-Surgical

Many people improve with

Observation: often all that is needed if it is not troublesome

Skin Care: protect the skin and dress it if it bursts

Antibiotics: used if the skin breaks down or infects

Aspiration: not routinely advised, as it often returns and risks infection

Plan B — Surgical

Considered when...

Pain: significant pain, with or without deformity

Skin: the skin is thin, bursting or repeatedly draining

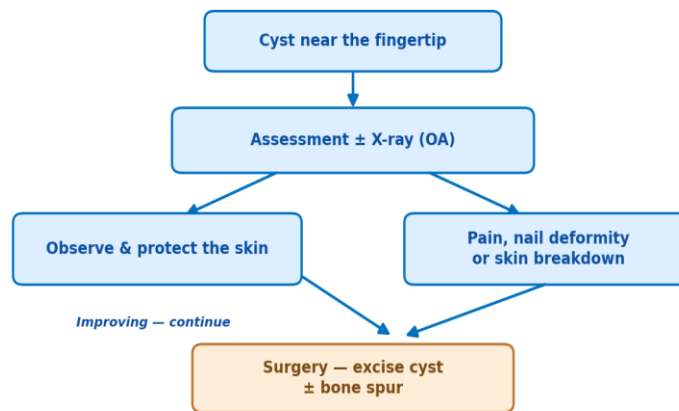
Appearance: the cyst is unsightly or deforming the nail

Options: excision, removal of bone spurs, or joint fusion

Approach: usually a day case under local anaesthetic

The Procedure: known as **Cyst Excision**, the cyst and any underlying bone spur are removed to protect the skin and reduce return, usually under **local anaesthetic**. A separate leaflet will be provided for the surgery.

Management Pathway



Red Flags — When to Seek Urgent Help

A hot, red or discharging cyst, spreading redness or fever — seek prompt assessment, as this may indicate infection of the joint. If you experience any of the above, contact the practice, your GP, NHS 111, or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

Important Things to Remember

- A mucous cyst is not cancerous
- Many need no treatment at all
- Protecting the skin is important
- Doing nothing is always an option

Questions You May Wish to Ask

- What treatments should I try first?
- How long should I try them for?
- What improvement can I expect?
- What happens if I don't have surgery?

Book or Enquire Directly at Each Site

- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|--|
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