

Lumps in the Fingers: Causes, Diagnosis and Treatment

Discovering a lump in your finger can be worrying. Many people immediately fear something serious, but the reassuring news is that **most lumps in the hand and fingers are benign (non-cancerous)**.

Hand surgeons see these conditions very frequently. In many cases the lump represents a harmless cyst or small tissue growth that may not require treatment at all. However, some lumps can cause discomfort, interfere with hand function, or occasionally indicate an underlying condition that benefits from treatment.

In this article we will explain:

- The **most common causes of lumps in the fingers**
- How these lumps are **diagnosed**
- What the **implications** are for your hand health
- The **treatment options** available

The most common lumps affecting the fingers include:

- **Ganglion cysts**
 - **Flexor sheath ganglions**
 - **Giant cell tumours of tendon sheath**
 - **Mucous cysts**
 - **Dupuytren's nodules**
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Why Do Lumps Develop in the Fingers?

The hand is made up of many closely packed structures including:

- Bones and joints
- Tendons that move the fingers
- Tendon sheaths that allow smooth movement
- Ligaments and connective tissue
- Skin and soft tissue

Because these structures sit close together, even a small change in one structure can produce a noticeable lump.

Most finger lumps arise from one of three sources:

Joint lining (synovium)

Fluid from a joint can form a cyst.

Tendon sheaths

Small swellings may arise from the lining around tendons.

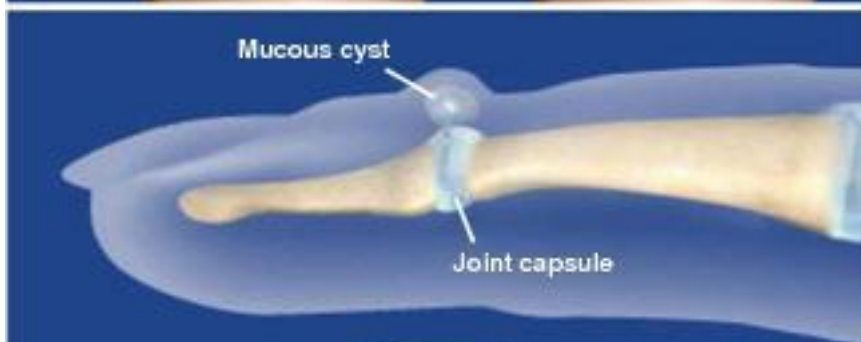
Local tissue growths

Benign growths can develop from the tissues of the hand.

A careful clinical examination by a hand specialist can usually identify the cause.

1. Ganglion Cysts







What is a ganglion cyst?

A **ganglion cyst** is the most common lump seen in the hand and wrist.

It is a **fluid-filled sac** arising from a joint or tendon sheath. The fluid inside is similar to joint fluid but thicker and jelly-like.

Ganglion cysts may appear:

- Near the **knuckle joints**
- At the **base of the finger**
- On the **back of the finger**

Symptoms

Many ganglions cause **no symptoms other than the lump itself**, but some people experience:

- Local discomfort
- A visible swelling
- A lump that **changes in size**
- Tenderness when pressure is applied

Sometimes the cyst can shrink or disappear spontaneously.

Treatment

Treatment may include:

Observation

If the cyst is painless, no treatment may be needed.

Aspiration

The fluid can sometimes be drained with a needle.

Surgical removal

Recommended if the cyst is painful or persistent.

2. Flexor Sheath Ganglions



What is a flexor sheath ganglion?

A **flexor sheath ganglion** is a small cyst that forms along the sheath surrounding the tendons that bend the fingers.

They are usually found:

- At the **base of the finger**
- On the **palm side of the hand**
- Near the **A1 pulley**, the same region involved in trigger finger.

What does it feel like?

Patients often notice:

- A **small firm lump**
- Local tenderness
- Pain when gripping objects

Because of its position, it may be uncomfortable when gripping tools or handlebars.

Treatment

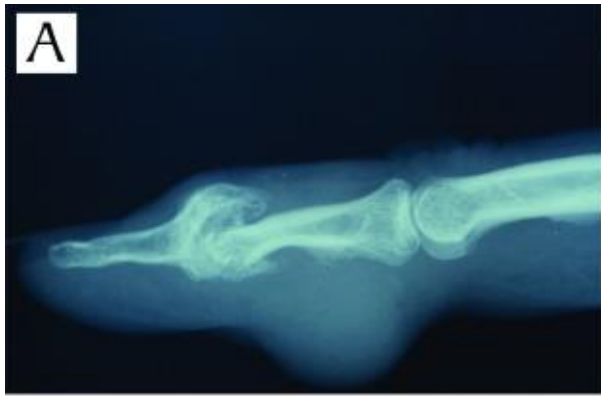
Options include:

- **Observation**
- **Needle rupture**
- **Minor surgical removal**

Surgery is typically straightforward and effective.

3. Giant Cell Tumour of Tendon Sheath









What is a giant cell tumour?

A **giant cell tumour of tendon sheath** is a benign growth arising from the lining of a tendon sheath.

Despite the name, these tumours are **almost always non-cancerous**.

They are actually the **second most common soft tissue tumour of the hand**.

Symptoms

Typical features include:

- A **firm lump**
- **Slow growth** over months or years
- Usually **painless**

Unlike ganglion cysts, these lumps are **solid rather than fluid-filled**.

Diagnosis

Diagnosis may involve:

- Clinical examination
- Ultrasound
- MRI scan in some cases

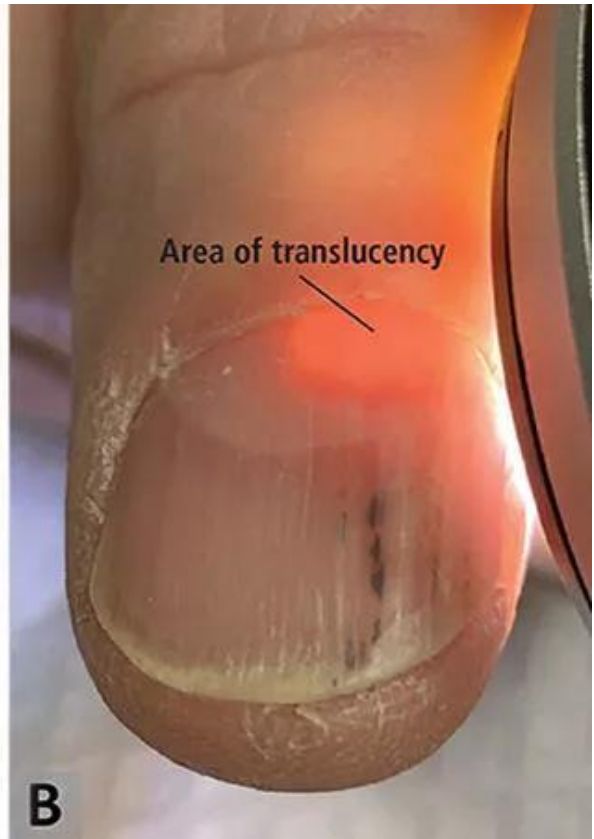
Treatment

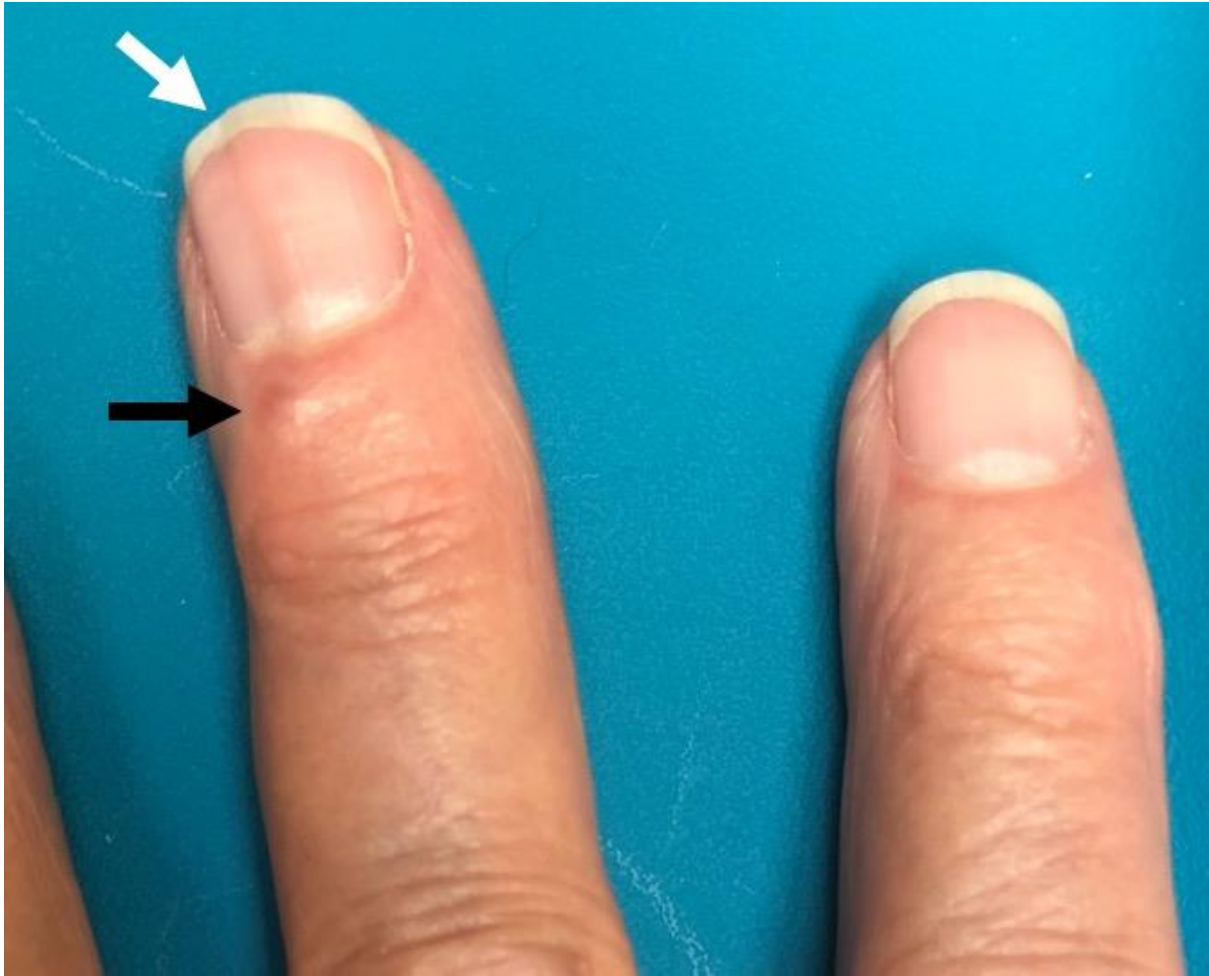
Treatment usually involves **surgical removal**.

Recurrence occurs in a small percentage of cases but most patients do very well after surgery.

4. Mucous Cysts







What is a mucous cyst?

A **mucous cyst** is a type of ganglion that occurs at the **end joint of the finger (the DIP joint)**.

These cysts are commonly associated with **osteoarthritis in the joint**.

They usually appear:

- On the **back of the finger**
- Near the **base of the fingernail**

Symptoms

Patients may notice:

- A **small translucent swelling**
- Thinning of the skin over the cyst
- A **groove in the fingernail**

Occasionally the cyst may leak clear fluid.

Treatment

Treatment options include:

- Monitoring the cyst
 - Needle aspiration (recurrence common)
 - **Surgical removal**, often with removal of small bone spurs
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5. Dupuytren's Nodules







What is a Dupuytren's nodule?

A **Dupuytren's nodule** is a firm lump that develops in the **palm of the hand**, usually near the base of the ring or little finger.

It represents an early stage of **Dupuytren's disease**, a condition where the connective tissue in the palm gradually thickens.

What does it feel like?

Patients may notice:

- A **small firm lump in the palm**
- Thickened skin in the area
- Occasionally mild tenderness early on

Over time, cords of tissue may form and can cause the finger to **bend towards the palm**.

However, many people develop nodules **without ever progressing to finger contracture**.

Who gets Dupuytren's disease?

Dupuytren's disease is more common in:

- People **over 50**
- Those with **Northern European ancestry**
- Men more than women

- People with a **family history**

Treatment

Early nodules often require **no treatment**.

If the condition progresses and the finger begins to bend, treatment options may include:

- **Needle fasciotomy**
- **Collagenase injections**
- **Surgical fasciectomy**

Specialist assessment can help determine the best timing of treatment.

How Doctors Diagnose Finger Lumps

Diagnosis usually begins with a **clinical examination**.

A hand specialist will assess:

- The size and shape of the lump
- Whether it is **soft, firm or fluid-filled**
- Whether it moves with tendons or joints
- Any tenderness or nerve symptoms

Investigations may include:

Ultrasound

Very helpful in distinguishing cysts from solid tumours.

MRI scanning

Used when the diagnosis is unclear.

X-rays

Useful if arthritis is suspected.

When Should You Seek Medical Advice?

You should seek medical advice if a lump:

- Continues to grow
- Becomes painful
- Interferes with finger movement
- Causes numbness or tingling

- Develops skin changes

Most lumps are harmless, but a proper diagnosis can provide reassurance.

Are Finger Lumps Ever Cancerous?

Cancerous tumours in the hand are **very rare**.

However, any lump that:

- grows rapidly
- causes persistent pain
- or changes the surrounding skin

should be assessed by a specialist.

Treatment Options for Finger Lumps

Treatment depends on the **type of lump and the symptoms it causes**.

Common approaches include:

Observation

Many lumps can simply be monitored.

Aspiration

Fluid-filled cysts can sometimes be drained.

Minor surgery

Used when a lump causes symptoms or continues to grow.

Most procedures are **day-case operations performed under local anaesthetic**, allowing a quick return to normal activities.

Key Points

- Most finger lumps are **benign and common**.
- Frequent causes include **ganglion cysts, flexor sheath ganglions, giant cell tumours, mucous cysts and Dupuytren's nodules**.
- Diagnosis is usually straightforward with **clinical examination and ultrasound**.

- Many lumps require **no treatment**, while others can be treated with simple procedures.
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✓ If you notice a new lump in your finger or palm, especially one that is growing or causing symptoms, it is sensible to seek specialist advice.
