

Mucous Cysts

A mucous cyst is a special type of ganglion cyst that arises near the root of a fingernail. They are balloon-like structures that arise from the membranous capsule around a joint or tendon, and they are filled with jellylike joint fluid. They typically cause a longitudinal groove to develop in the fingernail.

Although we don't know exactly what causes mucous cysts, we believe they are probably related to arthritis in the distal joint of the finger. The arthritis may cause a bone spur to develop which irritates the inner joint capsule and leads to the development of the mucous cyst.

Treatment Options

On occasion mucous cysts may disappear spontaneously, but I believe most often surgery is necessary to get rid of them. I would recommend that you not try to puncture the cyst on your own, as that can cause an infection which can be a serious problem.

Surgery to Remove a Mucous Cyst

Surgery to remove a mucous cyst is generally done as an outpatient procedure under local anesthesia. A T-shaped incision is made over the cyst and is carried all the way down to the joint capsule, where a small portion of the joint capsule is removed with the entire ganglion cyst. If a bone spur is present underneath the joint capsule, it will be removed also. Postoperatively the finger is put in a splint for a period of time, and then range of motion exercises are performed. It is usually about a two-week recovery before the hand can resume normal activities.

Risks of Ganglion Surgery

Like all operations, surgery to remove mucous cysts entails some risk. An infection may develop which may require treatment with antibiotics or perhaps even more surgery. Bleeding problems may also develop which may require more surgery. The tissues that produce the fingernail could get injured leading to permanent fingernail deformity. We are operating on the finger joint itself, so there is some chance of developing some loss of range of motion of the finger. Unfortunately there is a small chance of the mucous cyst recurring, even though it has been excised in its entirety.