

MANAGEMENT OF SOFT TISSUE LESIONS

**Information for patients,
relatives and carers**

This information sheet has been provided to help answer some of your questions

Leaflet Reference: SofTis0115

What is a soft tissue lesion?

It is a lump or bump on your foot. The most common soft tissue lesions found on the foot are:

- **Ganglion** – this is a relatively common cause of foot discomfort, usually occurring on the top of the tarsal joints (the midfoot). Ganglions are sacks filled with a natural jelly-like substance which occurs within joint spaces and allow for gliding of the tendon within its sheath. They are caused by a weakness, or ‘ballooning out’ of the joint capsule or tendon sheath. The only successful method of treating a ganglion is to remove it. During the operation, we also identify and repair the weak area of the foot which caused the ganglion.
- **Bursa** – this is also relatively common. However, a bursa comes from superficial tissue and occurs over joints, or a bone sticking out under the skin, where pressure and friction causes chronic irritation. The treatment for the bursa is the same as for a ganglion, but any deformity or area sticking out which is causing the bursa, may need to be removed.
- **Inclusion cyst** – these cysts are caused by a foreign body (such as a splinter or hair) getting under the skin and causing a reaction. They can become very hard and sore and often have to be removed. Common symptoms include pain associated with pressure from footwear and difficulty wearing shoes. If the cyst has been caused by a foreign body, you may also experience swelling and discharge from the area. Some people experience none of these symptoms, but are concerned with the appearance and increasing size of the lump.

How is the diagnosis made?

The diagnosis is made by examining your foot and asking you about your symptoms and any injuries you may have had to the area. If the diagnosis is unclear, we may ask you to go for an ultrasound scan or an MRI scan. These tests may also be used to find out the size and / or extent of the lump and whether any blood vessels or nerves are nearby.

What are the treatment options?

Non-surgical treatment

1. You can decide to leave the lesion as it is and have no treatment.
2. You can wear padding over the area to protect it when wearing shoes.
3. In some cases, we can offer an injection of cortisone (a type of steroid) to relieve symptoms temporarily.

Surgical treatment

If non-surgical treatment fails to relieve your symptoms, or there is concern about the type of lesion you have, we can offer you an operation to remove the lump or bump.

The operation is usually done as a day case under local anaesthetic, which means that you will be awake and will not need to stay in hospital overnight.

Please note that your foot or lower leg and foot will be numb from the anaesthetic for several hours. If the lump is on the sole of your foot, you will not be able to put any weight on your foot after the operation and will need to use crutches, because incisions on the bottom of the foot take one week longer to heal (three weeks instead of two) and may burst open if you walk too soon.

What are the risks associated with this operation?

Specific complications associated with removal of soft tissue lesions are:

- 5 – 15% risk of recurrence of symptoms due to regrowth of the lump.
- 4.44 % risk of permanent numbness in the operated area of the foot.
- Malignant (cancerous) tumours are extremely rare in the feet. However if cancer is found, further surgery may be required and more specialist care from an oncologist (cancer specialist) will be suggested.

Complications associated with foot surgery in general include:

- 11% risk of prolonged swelling for up to 6 months.
- Less than 2% risk that the operation will not relieve your current pain.
- 1.1% risk of post-operative infection, which can be resolved with antibiotics.
- 1% risk of DVT/ thrombosis (blood clot) and a 0.1% risk of pulmonary embolism (blood clot in the lungs).
- 1.03% risk of delayed healing for several weeks after surgery.
- 14% risk of a thickened scar, which may cause irritation with footwear.
- 0.62% risk of 'chronic pain syndrome'. This is a rare condition and we are not sure what causes it, but we do know that it can be associated with trauma (injury) or sometimes surgery.

Before your surgery

We will ask you to come to the clinic before your operation for a pre-operative assessment. This appointment will last approximately 30 minutes, when you will be asked about your medical history, medications and allergies. Your blood pressure will be taken, you will be tested for MRSA, and asked to sign a consent form.

If you have any questions or concerns, or if you do not understand anything that is said during this appointment, please do not hesitate to ask.

Getting things ready for your return home after surgery

- Ensure that you have a supply of over-the counter analgesics at home, ready for your return after surgery. You can take Paracetamol 500mg or Ibuprofen 200mg.
- Move essential items to a height that means you do not have to bend down low to reach them.
- If you have a freezer, stock it with easy-to-prepare food. Ensure you have ice or frozen vegetables in your freezer to apply to the back of your knee after your operation.
- Arrange for relatives and friends to do your heavy work (such as changing your bedsheets, vacuuming and gardening) and your shopping, as you will find it difficult to carry shopping whilst on crutches.

- If you live alone, set up a place where you can eat your meals in the kitchen; it will be difficult to carry items such as plates or cups as you will need to use both hands for your crutches.

Is there anything I should do to prepare for the operation?

- Please arrange for a friend or relative to be available to escort you home after your operation. You will need to organise your own transport home by car with someone else driving, as you will not be able to drive and should not travel home on public transport.
- You can take all your medications as usual. However, if you take blood-thinning medications such as **Warfarin** or **Aspirin**, it is very important that you inform us before you come for your surgery, as you may need to stop taking them for several days beforehand. If you have **asthma** or **angina**, please take your medicines as normal and bring a supply with you when you come for your appointment.
- On the day of your operation, please wash your feet thoroughly with warm soapy water, lightly scrub around the toenails with a soft brush, and remove all nail polish (as appropriate).
- You can eat and drink normally unless we have told you otherwise.
- Please do not wear make-up, nail varnish or jewellery (including body piercings) when you come for your procedure.
- To help you relax during the operation, you can bring a personal stereo or something to read. You may spend up to three hours at the Surgery Centre on the day of your operation, so you might like to bring a drink and a snack with you.
- As your foot will be bandaged after the operation, please wear either wide-legged trousers or a skirt that you can get over your bandage. You may also wish to bring a pair of shorts with you to wear under your theatre gown.

What happens on the day of my operation?

When you arrive at the surgery centre on the day of your operation, please report to the reception desk on the first floor. The surgeon will ask you to confirm your consent for him/ her to do the operation. If you require a Medical Certificate ('sick note') for your employer, this should be requested from your GP.

We will ask you to change into a hospital gown (and shorts if you have brought a pair with you) before taking you to the prep room. First, we may insert a Venflon (small needle, or 'cannula') into the back of your hand, which will allow us to give you fluids or medicines in the event of an emergency.

Next, we will ask you to lie on your side, to allow us to insert a small needle behind your ankle for the local anaesthetic. As the anatomy behind the ankle varies a little from person to person, we use a nerve stimulator to accurately identify the nerves. This sends a small electric current down the needle, which stimulates the nerve and also the muscles controlled by it, causing them to contract and relax. When your foot starts to kick on its own, we know that we have identified the correct nerve and can then inject the anaesthetic with precision.

You will then be left to rest for a short time to allow the anaesthetic to fully take effect before surgery. You will be shown how to use crutches (if required) and given advice about coping with stairs and so on.

When the area is completely numb, we will take you into the operating theatre. The lump will be removed and sent to the laboratory for routine testing – the procedure takes approximately 30 minutes to complete

The wound will be closed with absorbable sutures (stitches). It will be covered with a dressing and a 'tubigrip' bandage, which must stay in place until your next clinic appointment.

What happens after the operation?

You will return to the recovery room, where a nurse will remove the Venflon from your hand and fit your operated foot with a surgical shoe. Providing you are well, you should be able to go home approximately 40 minutes after your operation.

We will give you a 3-day supply of medication to take home with you. It is important that you start taking the painkillers before the anaesthetic completely wears off, as this will allow you to remain comfortable and pain-free.

Is there anything I need to watch out for at home?

You should seek assistance immediately if you experience the following symptoms:

- Unbearable pain, not relieved by painkillers
- Tight bandages – constant tingling or pins and needles or blue toes. In an emergency, you can loosen the bandage yourself, but please seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- Pain or swelling in your calves or the veins in your legs
- Difficulty in breathing or chest pain
- A high temperature or fever (38° or above)

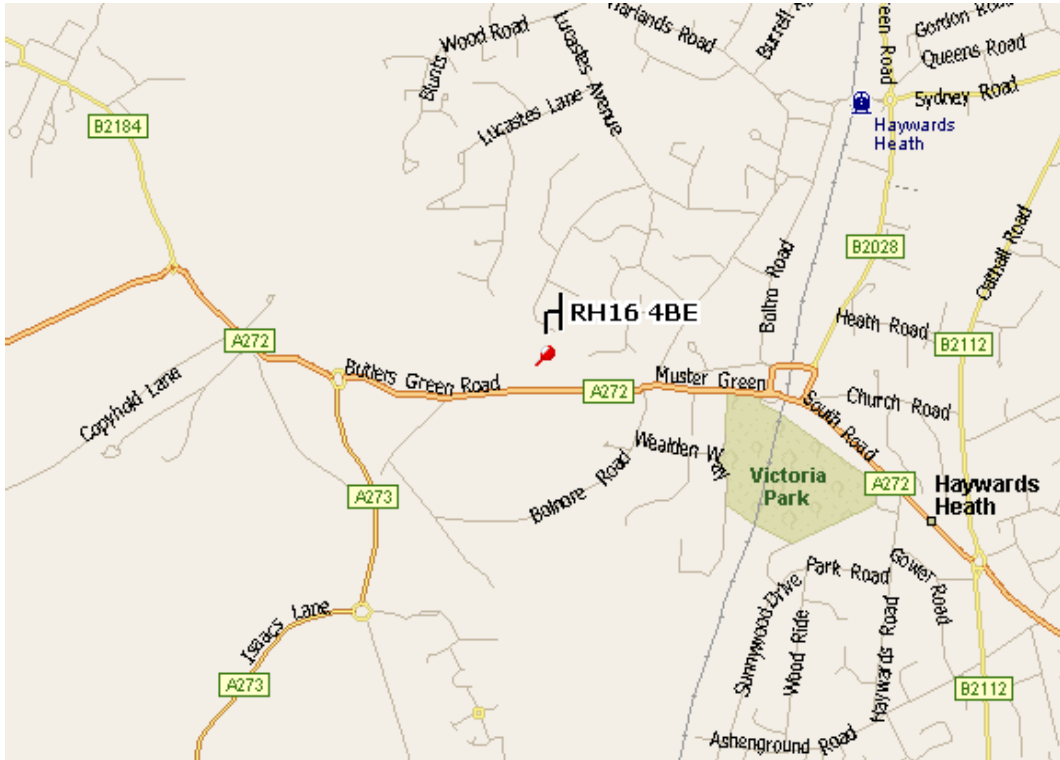
If a problem arises during clinic hours (9.00am – 4.00pm, Monday - Wednesday), please contact the Podiatric Surgery Unit on 01444-238895. The team will alert a member of the surgery team, who will telephone you to discuss your symptoms and advise you on how to proceed.

If a problem arises outside of clinic hours for the first 4 days after your procedure, contact the on-call surgeon on 07778-808220 and describe your symptoms/concerns, giving as much detail as possible. If you have a clinical emergency after this time period please contact your GP on-call service or attend A&E.

If you are told to do so – *and only if you are told to do so* - you should make your way to:

The Kleinwort Centre
Butlers Green Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 4BE

Tel: 01444-445600



(The Kleinwort Centre is located on the A272, opposite Beechurst Gardens in Haywards Heath)

The on-call surgeon will contact the Kleinwort Centre to let them know that you are on your way. He will meet you there and administer appropriate treatment. A non-urgent appointment will then be made for you to return to the Sydney West Podiatry Centre for routine treatment during normal clinic hours.

Will I need to visit the Sydney West Centre again?

Yes. You may need to return to the clinic for follow-up appointments 1 week, 2 weeks and possibly 3 weeks after surgery.

How do I look after my foot at home?

For the first 7 days after surgery

- Keep your leg elevated (raised) as much as possible, as this will help minimise swelling and pain. Only walk to the toilet and back, always using your crutches (if supplied) and wearing your surgical shoe. **Do not drive.**
- You must wear your surgical shoe at all times when you are weight-bearing (i.e. standing or walking), but it can be removed when resting or in bed.
- Take your painkillers at regular intervals and as prescribed, starting before the anaesthetic wears off. Even if you do not have any pain, it is advisable to take the anti-inflammatory tablets (if prescribed), as they reduce swelling.

- Ice can be used to reduce pain and swelling. At home, you should wrap some ice cubes or a bag of frozen vegetables (or similar) in a damp tea towel and place behind your knee; *this should be held in place for no more than 20 minutes at a time* but you can do this several times a day. We advise that you place it behind your knee rather than on your foot, as this will prevent your wound from getting wet and can also help the anaesthetic last longer. Always check your skin afterwards as ice can burn and cause blisters; for this reason, you should never place plastic bags of ice or frozen vegetables directly onto the skin.
- To reduce the risk of DVT (deep vein thrombosis) or the formation of blood clots:
 1. drink plenty of fluids, but avoid alcohol
 2. do not smoke as this impairs wound healing.
- Help your blood to circulate to your operated foot by:
 1. rotating the ankle and bending the knee regularly
 2. keeping the tubigrip up to knee level
 3. walking to the toilet and back again.
- Please **keep your wound dry** (do not bath or shower) until you have had your second follow-up appointment, approximately 2 - 3 weeks after surgery.
- If the lump was on the sole of your foot, you will not be able to put any weight on your foot for three weeks after your operation. This is because incisions (cuts) on the bottom of the foot take slightly longer to heal and the wound may burst open if you walk too soon.

5 – 7 days after surgery

- We will contact you by telephone to review your recovery.
- If all is well, you will be able to increase your activity although it will still be a good idea to elevate your leg regularly, as this will minimise swelling.
- We will advise you to start walking on your heel, using your crutches (if supplied) for balance and wearing your surgical shoe. Throughout the week, you should build up to putting weight on your whole foot, still using your crutches as appropriate.
- You should continue to keep your wound dry and your tubigrip up to the knee at all times.
- If you still need painkillers at this stage, you may be trying to do too much and not resting your foot enough.

10 – 14 days after surgery (or 21 days if you have stitches on the sole of your foot)

- We will ask you to return to the Clinic to have the stitches removed (unless absorbable stitches were used). The dressing and tubigrip will also be removed at this appointment and we will ask for the return of your crutches (if supplied). **Please bring a thick-soled trainer or supportive lace-up shoe (for your operated foot) with you to this appointment.**

- We may give you some daily exercises to help with joint mobilisation and tendon strengthening. These exercises may cause some discomfort or pain, but they are essential to prevent joint stiffness. You should continue to do the exercises every day for the next 3 months.
- When your stitches and dressings have been removed, you will be able to bath / shower as normal.
- You can massage your scar with vitamin E oil, cream or gel to improve its appearance.
- At this stage, we encourage most patients to wear a thick-soled trainer or supportive lace-up shoe for the next 6 weeks to give protection and help minimise swelling while the foot continues to heal.

When can I get back to normal?

You will probably need to take 4 – 6 weeks off work, depending on the type of job that you do, how far you need to travel and how well your foot is healing. You can obtain a Medical Certificate ('sick note') from your GP – a Discharge Summary will be sent to him/her on the day of your procedure, so he/she will be fully aware of the treatment that you have received.

We advise that you **not to drive** until you are able to wear a shoe on your affected foot and you can perform an emergency stop without discomfort. It is important to inform your insurance company that you have had an operation to ensure that you are covered in the event of an accident.

How do I make a comment about my treatment?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any questions you may have. If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please speak to a member of the surgical team or contact the Service Experience Team as follows:

The Sussex Experience Team
Sussex Community NHS Trust
FREEPOST (BR117)
Elm Grove
Brighton
BN2 3EW

Tel: 01273-242292

Email: SC-TR.serviceexperience@nhs.net