

Lumps

Most lumps are harmless and do not need any treatment. However, it is very important to see your GP if you have any concerns about the lump, or if the lump doesn't disappear within two weeks.

What are the common causes of a lump?

The possible causes of a lump depend on which part of the body the lump appears. Some types of lump can occur in many different parts of the body. Other types of lump are specific to one part.

Trauma or injury

An injury to any part of the body can cause swelling or a lump. If the swelling or lump is very painful, you should see your doctor (or go to the local hospital accident and emergency) if you think the injury may have caused a broken bone.

Other common examples of lumps that can occur in different parts of the body include the following. See the links for more information on each type of lump:

Epidermoid and pilar cysts (sebaceous cysts).

These look like small smooth lumps under the surface of the skin. They are generally non-cancerous (benign) and usually cause no harm or problems. [See the separate leaflet called Epidermoid and Pilar Cysts \(Sebaceous Cysts\).](#)

Lipoma

A lipoma is a benign fatty lump that usually causes no symptoms or problems. Lipomas often occur on the shoulder, back, chest or arm. Most lipomas are small and are best left alone. Larger lipomas can be removed by a simple operation done under local anaesthetic. [See the separate leaflet called Lipoma.](#)

Swollen lymph glands

Swollen lymph glands are most often felt in the **neck**, under the **armpit** or in the **groin**. Most swollen lymph glands are caused by infection. Swollen lymph glands may occasionally be caused by more serious conditions such as cancer. [See the separate leaflet called Swollen Lymph Glands.](#)

Skin abscess

An abscess is a collection of pus. Most abscesses form just under the skin. A boil is the most common example. In this case, a hair follicle (root) becomes infected and develops into a small abscess. The symptoms of a skin abscess include swelling, redness, pain and warmth over the affected area. [See the separate leaflet called Abscess.](#)

Skin cancer usually causes a change in the appearance of the skin. Skin cancer does not usually cause a lump. [See the separate leaflet called Skin Cancer Types.](#)

Other possible causes of a lump

Some types of lumps are specific to one part of the body. There are many different causes of lumps but common examples include the following:

Lump on the face

The possible causes of a lump in the face include:

- Swelling on the eyelid, such as a stye or chalazion. See the separate leaflets called [Stye](#) and [Chalazion](#).
- Swelling of a salivary gland, which may be caused by many conditions, including a salivary gland stone or infection with mumps. See the separate leaflets called [Salivary Gland Stones \(Salivary Calculi\)](#) and [Mumps](#).

Lump in the neck or throat

The most common causes of lumps in the neck include swollen lymph glands or an enlarged thyroid gland. An enlarged thyroid gland may be an enlargement of the whole thyroid gland (goitre) or a may be a lump in one part of the thyroid gland.

See the separate leaflets called [Swollen Lymph Glands](#) and [Goitre \(Thyroid Swelling\)](#).

Lump in the breast

Breast lumps are common and most breast lumps are not caused by breast cancer. However, any unusual changes in your breasts, including the appearance of a lump, should always be checked by a doctor as soon as possible.

This applies to men as well as women. Men can also develop a lump in the breast and can also have breast cancer (although this is rare compared with women).

[See the separate leaflet called Breast Lumps.](#)

Lump in the groin

The most common causes of a [lump in the groin](#) include a hernia or an enlarged lymph gland.

[See the separate leaflet called Hernia.](#)

Lump in the scrotum

Most lumps in the scrotum are harmless and are not cancer. However, any man who has a lump in the scrotum should be checked by a doctor as soon as possible.

[See the separate leaflet called Scrotal Lumps, Pain and Swelling.](#)

Lump around the back passage (anus)

The causes of a lump near to the back passage include:

- A pile (haemorrhoid): small veins (blood vessels) within the lining of the back passage sometimes become wider and engorged with more blood than usual. The engorged veins and the overlying tissue may then form into one or more small swellings called piles. [See the separate leaflet called Piles \(Haemorrhoids\).](#)
- An abscess. [See the separate leaflet called Abscess.](#)

Lump on the hand, wrist, finger or top of the foot

A lump on the hand, wrist, finger or the top of the foot may be a ganglion. This is a type of cyst that forms around the joints or tendons.

[See the separate leaflet called Ganglion.](#)

Skin tags

Skin tags are small, skin-coloured 'tags' that occur most usually where there are skin folds. Common places are the neck, armpits, groin and eyelids. They are also known as acrochordons. They are usually 0.2 to 0.5 cm in diameter. It may be that skin tags are caused by irritation and chaffing as skin folds rub together. Skin tags do not become cancers but can be removed if they are causing irritation or for cosmetic reasons, although this usually has to be done privately rather than by the NHS.

Cancerous lumps

These days most people are quite aware of cancer. People often worry that any lump they find might be a cancerous one. Whilst most lumps are not cancer, there are certain features that make the possibility more likely.

These include the lump:

- Being very hard when you feel it.
- Having an irregular outline.
- Seeming fixed to the skin (or other structures) around it.

. It is sensible to have the lump checked, as you may need treatment.

Are cancerous lumps painful?

Many lumps are painful, but pain isn't usually a feature of cancer lumps. Other causes of a lump, such as an infected cyst or a lymph gland, are more likely to be tender, or painful.

When should you see a doctor about a lump?

Most lumps are harmless and do not need any treatment. However, it is very important to see your GP if:

- The lump feels hard or firm.
- The lump is painful.
- The lump is getting bigger.

- The lump doesn't completely disappear within two weeks.
- You feel generally unwell with a [high temperature \(fever\)](#) or flu-like symptoms.
- You have recently lost weight without trying to diet.
- You have any other unexplained symptoms.
- The lump returns after it has been removed.

Further reading

- [Brown KW, Lucas E, Hoppe IC, et al](#); A Review on Lumps, Bumps, and Birthmarks: When and Why to Refer. *Pediatr Ann.* 2023 Jan;52(1):e23-e30. doi: 10.3928/19382359-20221114-07. Epub 2023 Jan 1.
- [Gong JH, Mehrzad R, Bhatt RA](#); Practical Management of Lumps and Bumps of the Fingers, Hand, and Wrist. *J Am Board Fam Med.* 2022 Dec 23;35(6):1194-1203. doi: 10.3122/jabfm.2022.220028R2.
- [Church DJ, Krumme J, Kotwal S](#); Evaluating Soft-Tissue Lumps and Bumps. *Mo Med.* 2017 Jul-Aug;114(4):289-294.

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