

Lipoma

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A patient's guide



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What is a lipoma?

A lipoma is a soft smooth lump under the skin or within muscle layers with the shape of a flattened sphere or an egg. It is made of fat cells and feels slightly thicker than normal fat. It can be any size from less than a centimetre to greater than ten centimetres across.

Lipomas grow very slowly, or stay at the same size. They tend to get bigger if you gain weight. Lipomas occur anywhere in the body but most commonly on the trunk, arms and legs.

How is a lipoma diagnosed?

In most cases a doctor can readily diagnose a lipoma by examining it. Occasionally if there is doubt the doctor may organise a scan to check a lipoma.

How can lipomas be treated?

Most lipomas do not need any treatment. If a lipoma is more than ten centimetres across and interfering with function then it can be removed surgically.

The operation is usually done under local anaesthetic if the lipoma is near the skin, but may need a general anaesthetic if it is deeper. The surgeon makes a cut in the skin over the lipoma, removes it, and sews the wound closed, usually with dissolving stitches.

After the operation

You will have a dressing over the wound and be advised to leave this undisturbed and dry for 3-4 days. You will have a permanent scar.

There is a small risk of bleeding, bruising and infection in the wound, but precautions will be taken to prevent these.

Multiple lipomas

Some people have many lipomas on their bodies and limbs. In most cases, once a doctor has confirmed the diagnosis, no surgery is needed since the lipomas are harmless.