



## **Lowe Plastic Surgery (LPS)**

### **Dr. Lowe's Facts about Tumor Surgery of the Hand**

#### **How do I get started?**

It is important prior to surgery for patients to spend some time educating themselves about the pros and cons of hand surgery. Although patients who undergo hand surgery are typically happy, this elective operation is not for everybody. The main risks of surgery are bleeding, infection, damage to adjacent structure, pain, contour irregularity, and scarring. Read the educational materials provided and on our website including consent forms prior to your surgery. Make sure that your surgeon is Board Certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery, a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and American Society for Surgery of the Hand Surgery (ASSH). Please check out websites and links at: [www.drjlowe.com](http://www.drjlowe.com)

#### **Do I need soft tissue tumor surgery?**

Patients with a localized tumor or several tumors of the hand are usually the best candidates for in office surgery under local anesthetic. Patients considering removal of a small tumor need to decide if the risks are worth it or not? Is the tumor increasing in size, painful, inflamed or infected? Many family doctors say if the tumor is not bothering you do not worry about it. Unfortunately, many tumors of the hand are ganglion cyst prone to cycles of inflammation and chronic pain. It is usually best to remove a tumor when it limits activity or is increasing in size. Sometimes hand tumor rupture and go away, but almost always the recur resulting in increasing discomfort. Also as the tumor enlarges the surgical incision will also need to be made longer to allow for adequate removal. The general "rule of thumb" should be applied which means that if a tumor equals the tip of your thumb it is usually best to remove. The most important thing is for patients to remove tumors if they are enlarging, painful, deforming, or result in functional limitation. Every tumor of the hand has the potential to represent malignancy or cancer. A frank discussion with a board certified plastic surgeon will help patients make the right decision about this procedure.

#### **Is hand surgery covered by health insurance?**

Tumor surgery of the hand by definition is a medical procedure. It is covered by insurance as a stand-alone procedure. Some patients have scarring or tumors that are only a cosmetic concern that rarely may not be covered under insurance. However, hand tumors that occur after trauma or following reconstruction may be covered under revision medical coding. Many patients undergoing hand surgery require a referral from their primary care physician or pre-approval from their insurance in advance of surgery. Most hand surgery performed in our office or under local anesthesia is covered but patients are required to pay part or all of their deductible in advance. Patients are encouraged to review the fees associated with hand surgery with our office or their insurance before surgery. Dr. Lowe's staff will be happy to discuss these issues during the course of the consultation and consent process.

#### **What is the difference surgery under local or general anesthesia?**

There are a number of different ways to perform hand surgery. Most plastic surgeons performing significant surgery with multiple tumors, tumor near a vital structure, or large tumor prefer patients to be under anesthesia to ensure patient comfort and safety. Small tumors and/or no more than two tumors may be removed under local anesthetic in most cases. Local procedures require preparation and local injection that can be well managed in certain areas. In our practice tumor surgery of the hand is billed based on size, location, and complexity. Patients rarely complain of significant pain following minor hand surgery regardless of the technique. A consultation with a hand surgeon allows patients to determine the technique best suited for them.

**Will the surgical scar be noticeable?**

All hand surgery requires surgical incisions in the skin. Multiple incisions are required in most cases for multiple tumors. Plastic surgeons try to place incisions in the natural creases or folds of the hand to conceal the scar. Dr. Lowe will review scar treatment once the incisions heal. Scars typically look the worse at 2 months and then improve by 6 months. Prominent scars are rare but can be improved with minor revision or laser treatment. Contour irregularities can be seen due to soft tissue displacement, scarring, or patient genetics (some patients just scar more). Patients should have a frank discussion with their plastic surgeon to help them understand where the incision or scar will be placed.

**Will the hand tumor recur or come back?**

The results of tumor surgery of the hand do not always last forever. The recurrence rate for most soft tissue tumors of the hand is around 10%. The number can be higher or lower depending on the tumor itself. Patients who tend to form tumor of the hand such as ganglion cyst, giant cell tumors, or lipomas often have multiple tumors in different locations. All hand tumors are sent to pathology for examination. If the tumor is malignant further surgeries will be required to treat the tumor. Dr. Lowe will discuss his findings as well as the pathology after surgery or at follow-up.

**Does future revision hand surgery cost a lot?**

The cost for revision is limited for patients who experience minor complications following hand surgery when returning to the original surgeon. Most revisions can be address with a simple in-office procedure performed under local anesthetic. In some cases, revision surgery is necessary to address more complex issues. Complicated hand surgery often carries a greater risk of revision. Patients should follow post-operative instructions closely to limit revision rates. Patients should usually wait 4-6 months to fully judge clinical results or surgical scars. Dr. Lowe performs a number of revisions on patients who are unhappy with a previous hand surgeon. Most of these patients had hand surgery with well-trained hand or plastic surgeons. Dr. Lowe recommends patients first return to their board certified surgeon to discuss common concerns, complications, or hand tumor recurrence. Patients should talk to their surgeon about the risks and potential complications of elective hand surgery.

**Where and when should I have hand surgery?**

One of the most important decisions for patients considering hand surgery is where and when. Larger procedures can be performed at a hospital with overnight stay or surgical facility with home care. The benefit of a hospital setting is overnight pain management and care. Patients in a surgical facility will be given a period of recovery and then go home the same day. In general, minor hand procedures are better in outpatient setting and larger hand procedures or those performed near vital structures or tendon sheaths are better in an insurance approached surgical setting. Most patients require very little assistance at home the day after the procedure, feel better at 2 days, and recovery fully by 3 weeks. Although Dr. Lowe performs most minor hand surgery in his office based surgical center under local, each patient should make their own decision of when and where they should have surgery.

**What is the recovery like after minor hand surgery?**

The recovery from hand surgery is usually predictable. Patients are asked to limit activity and keep the hand strictly elevated for at least 1 week after surgery. Most patients are placed in a light splint or compression dressing for several days after surgery. Some patients require drains to help decrease fluid collection and control swelling. Most drains used in this situation stay for 1-2 days, but bigger surgery may require drains for longer. Sutures usually stay in place for 2-3 weeks and may even fall out on their own. Patients scars may take 6 months or two years to fully mature. Patients often report swelling, numbness, contour irregularities, and pain for up to 6 months after surgery. A number of patients will require rehabilitation with a hand therapist to avoid complications and to allow for full recovery. Most patients requiring a hand therapist or

occupational therapist will need to be seen for several months. Patients are encouraged to talk to Dr. Lowe about recovery and the possible need for professional rehabilitation services.

### **What about patient safety?**

There are a variety of safety concerns related to hand surgery. Many of the concerns are related to post-operative swelling and pain control. Some patients can develop problems with chronic pain following even minor hand or extremity surgery. However, in most cases the safety of surgery is most dependent on the surgeon and facility. Hand surgery is usually an elective operation reserved in for patients in good health in an outpatient setting. Dr. Lowe is a real plastic surgeon and hand surgeon, who performs real hand surgery, in a real surgical center. As a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) and American Society for Surgery of the Hand (ASSH) he is required to follow guidelines designed to ensure the best patient safety and outcomes. Dr. Lowe proudly performs surgery in accredited hospitals and surgical facilities. Most of his surgical patients undergo surgery at his certified in-office operating suite, Associates Surgery Center of Oklahoma (ASCO). ASCO is fully certified by the American Association for the Accreditation of Ambulatory Surgery Facilities (AAAASF). For further information about safety and credentials go to: [www.AAAASF.org](http://www.AAAASF.org) or [www.drjlowe.com](http://www.drjlowe.com)

### **Should I wait and think about my options?**

Hand surgery is rarely an urgent surgery. Most patients have been dealing with tumor of the hand or extremity for years before they seek consultation. In general, removing tumors when they are small and not infected is recommended when possible. Although the procedure carries limited risks, the benefits can be substantial. Patients require a period of recovery, elevation, splinting, and rehabilitation. Further procedures may be required based on the clinical outcome or pathology report. Patient should choose a board certified plastic & hand surgeon that they trust, takes time, reviews risks, and puts safety first. One of the most important aspects of the procedures is patient care and follow-up. When possible, patients should talk about their plans with physicians, family members, and significant others. Patients should have realistic expectations regarding the hand surgery, recovery, and results. Hand surgery is often the right thing for the right person

### **What are Dr. Lowe's take home points?**

1. Review the incision location and size in advance of surgery
2. Make sure you have an adequate time to recover and care for the wound.
3. Understand risks (bleeding, infection, damage to adjacent structures, pain, and scars).
4. Remove hand tumors before they get too big or infected.
5. Strict elevation of the hand is required for 5-7 days after surgery.
6. Most soft tissue surgery is quick with a short recovery.
7. Removal of a hand tumor does not always fully solve the problem.
8. Some tumors of the hand are the result of significant joint disease.
9. Some had surgery should be performed at a hospital and require an overnight stay.
10. Surgeon and facility certification and safety matters.