Dear Alice:

I've noticed what appears to be a wrist bone protruding on the back of my right hand. It's on the thumb side and closest to my forearm bones. I've been playing a lot of golf lately, and someone told me it was a "golf nodule." If so, what are golf nodules? Is this dangerous (it doesn't hurt right now), and do I need to do anything about it?

-Hacking in the Midwest

Answer

Dear Hacking in the Midwest,

It sounds like the "golf nodule" you're describing is what medical professionals often call a tumor. Now, "tumor" doesn't necessarily mean cancer. Tumor is just the technical term for any lump, bump, mass, cyst, or nodule on or inside your body. And not to worry, the vast majority of tumors (especially those found on the hand, like yours) are not cancerous — they're benign. Even though it's not necessarily dangerous, it's a good idea to have your primary care provider take a peek at it in order to rule out any serious conditions. S/he can recommend treatment, if needed, or help you arrange to get it removed.

Though it is unclear what causes them, there are many different types of tumors that can occur on the hand. Three of the most common are:

- **Ganglion cysts**, which are outgrowths of the lining of the joints or tendon sheaths. The thick lubricating fluid of the joint fills these cysts and makes them feel firm to the touch. They usually occur at the wrist (approximately where your nodule is), but they can also appear at any other joint such as the base of a finger or the knuckles.

- **Giant cell tumors of the tendon sheath**, which are solid tumors that can occur anywhere near the lining of tendons. Fortunately, these slow growing tumors are not cancerous.

- **Epidermal inclusion cysts**, which are sacks just below the skin that are filled with keratin, a soft cheese-like substance produced by your skin cells.

In addition to these three, there are a myriad of other tumors that can occur on the hand. Almost all of them are considered benign. It is also possible that the bump on your wrist could be a bone spur, which might feel like a hard lump. Sometimes even foreign bodies such as splinters can cause bumps to form. Though extremely rare, it is possible for your nodule to be
caused by a cancerous tumor. A healthcare provider would need to do a biopsy in order to diagnose the bump as cancer.

The next step you take is based on the diagnosis of the tumor. Often these bumps will go away on their own; others require draining (if they are fluid filled) or surgical removal by a healthcare provider. Surgery (which is usually done with a local anesthetic and as an outpatient procedure) is often the most effective treatment?sometimes the tumors return if they are only drained. If the tumor is benign, you may choose to leave it alone and go about your life as usual. But keep an eye on it. If you experience pain, numbness, changes in skin color near the tumor, or an increase in size, take another trip to your provider for reevaluation. If the tumor causes you pain or otherwise interferes with your life (i.e., your golf game), you may want to opt for surgery.

Columbia students on the Morningside campus can make an appointment with Medical Services [2] using Open Communicator [3] or by calling 212-854-2284. Students at the Medical Center can make an appointment with the Student Health Center [4].

Best of luck with your golf game!

Alice!

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