

What is a hernia repair?

PATIENT/FAMILY INFORMATION SHEET

What is a hernia?

A hernia develops as a result of weakened muscles in the abdominal wall. Internal organs, such as the intestines, then protrude or push through the weakened area, causing a bulge under the skin. This area may be weakened by age, injury, or a past surgical incision.

Hernias are a common condition for both men and women. There are three different types of abdominal hernias:

- Inguinal, which occurs in the groin area
- Umbilical/ventral which occurs in the area of the umbilicus, or “belly button”
- Incisional, which occurs at the site of a previous surgical incision.

Prior to surgery, there are special considerations for some men and for pregnant women:

- For men with an enlarged prostate, consultation with a urologist around the time of the hernia repair may be necessary.
- For pregnant women, consultation with their gynecologist and surgeon is recommended.

What is a hernia repair?

A hernia repair is called a herniorrhaphy. This is a surgical procedure that may be performed by the conventional method of making an incision in the abdomen, by the tension-free mesh technique, or by laparoscopic method. Your surgeon will choose the method with you that best meets your individual needs.

- *Conventional method:* An incision, or cut, is made over the area of the hernia, the protruding portion of tissue is put back into the abdominal cavity, and the hole or weakness in the abdominal wall is repaired by sewing strong surrounding muscle over the defect.
- *Tension-free mesh technique:* An incision is made over the area of the hernia, the protruding portion of tissue is put back into the abdominal cavity, and a piece of mesh is used to cover the weakened area of the abdominal wall without having to sew the surrounding muscles together.
- *Laparoscopic method:* Three to four small incisions are made in the abdomen near the area of the hernia. A long metal tube (called a laparoscope) with a light and eyepiece is inserted into one of the incisions. Instruments to repair the hernia are inserted into the other small incisions. The eyepiece of the laparoscope is connected to a television monitor allowing the surgeon to see the hernia to repair it. The protruding portion of tissue is put back into the abdominal cavity, and the hole or weakness in the abdominal wall is repaired by placement of mesh over the defect.

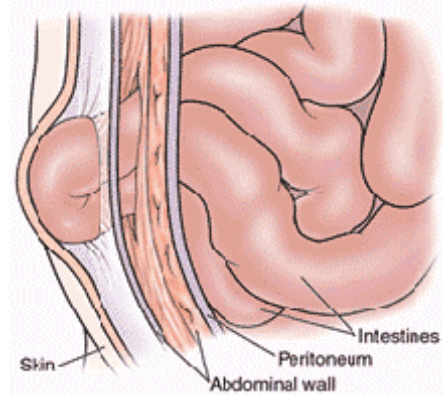


Image Source: www.siamhealth.net

Why is the hernia repair important?

A hernia can be very uncomfortable. It may cause sharp or dull pain that worsens when having a bowel movement, during urination, or when lifting objects. Sometimes, a hernia may become strangulated, which means that the tissue that herniated through the abdominal wall becomes swollen and pinched so that the blood supply is cut off. This will cause infection and tissue death. This can lead to a life-threatening medical emergency that requires immediate attention.

What should I expect after the surgery?

- You may have pain and discomfort after the surgery. Your surgeon will order medications for pain and it is important to take this medication as ordered when you are feeling uncomfortable.
- You may have some difficulty walking the first few hours after the surgery, but it is important to get out of bed and walk around to help your breathing and to prevent blood clots from forming in your legs.
- Your diet will be advanced from clear liquids to your normal diet as you begin to tolerate foods.
- Sometimes people have difficulty urinating after surgery from the anesthesia. It is important to let your nurse know if you are having difficulty with urination.
- Your surgeon will advise you as to when you may drive and return to work

Are there any complications that may occur after the surgery?

As with any surgery, infection and bleeding are two complications that may occur after the surgery and it is important to recognize the symptoms of both and report them to your surgeon. The symptoms of infection may include:

- Fever
- Nausea
- Drainage at the incision site
- Redness around incision
- Pain and/or tenderness at incision site
- Skin around incision warm to touch
- Overwhelming feeling of weakness

The symptoms of bleeding may include:

- Bright red blood on abdominal dressing
- Bleeding from incision
- Lightheadedness
- Dizziness
- Elevated heart/pulse rate
- Decreased blood pressure

Can a hernia recur?

Sometimes a hernia can recur, but there are certain things that can be done to reduce the risk of recurrence. These include:

- Receiving medical help for chronic constipation or chronic cough, which can cause straining on the abdominal wall muscles
- Following a weight reduction program if you are overweight.

Source: American Medical Association and American College of Surgeons Medical Library @ www.medem.com Retrieved October 2005.

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