

Hernia Repair Surgery

What is a hernia?

A hernia is a weakness in the muscles of the abdomen. Part of the bowel may push through the weak area, causing a lump under the skin. A hernia may also be called a rupture.

Some of the common places hernias can occur are:

- in the groin - called an inguinal hernia
- in the upper thigh - called a femoral hernia
- in the navel - called an umbilical hernia
- at the incision from a previous operation (incisional hernia)

Why do I need a hernia repair?

Hernias can cause pain or discomfort. They may get bigger if they are not repaired. Sometimes the bowel or intestines become trapped in a hernia. This may cause the bowel to become blocked. Urgent surgery is then needed to fix this.

What happens during a hernia repair?

You may have either a general, spinal or local anaesthetic. Your doctor will decide the type of anaesthetic you need.

With a general anaesthetic, you will sleep during surgery. With a spinal anaesthetic, you will be awake during surgery, but you cannot feel from the waist down. With a local anaesthetic, the area around the hernia is numbed or “frozen”. This means you will not feel pain in this area, but may feel some pressure.

There are 2 ways of repairing a hernia. In the **laparoscopic method**, the doctor repairs the hernia through several very small incisions. In the **open method**, one larger incision is made at the site of the hernia. In both methods, the bowel is put back in place and the weak area of the muscle wall is repaired. You will have a mesh sewn over the muscle to strengthen it even more.

How will I feel after surgery?

You may have some pain or discomfort from the incision(s) after surgery. You may also feel nauseated or sick to your stomach. If you have these feelings, tell your nurse. Your nurse will give you medication that can help. You may learn how to use a Patient Controlled Analgesia pump to give yourself pain control medication.

What will happen to me after surgery?

After surgery, you will have an intravenous (IV) in your arm. The IV is used to give you fluids, until you are drinking well. Medications can also be given through the IV.

You will have a gauze bandage or surgical tape over your incision(s):

- If you had the open method of repair, there will be stitches or clips under the bandage. The incisions will take 6 to 8 weeks to fully heal.
- If you had a laparoscopic repair, the healing time will be shorter. You may feel some thickness under your incision that feels like a rope after you heal.

When will I go home?

You may go home the same day as your surgery, or 1 to 2 days after surgery. Talk with your doctor about this before surgery.

What should I eat?

Your nurse will tell you when you can start drinking fluids and eating after surgery. After the IV is taken out, you will need to drink about 6 to 8 glasses of fluid over the next 24 hours.

When you are at home, eat your regular diet. It is important to prevent constipation, so that you will not strain to have a bowel movement. Straining puts pressure on your incision(s). Eating foods high in fibre and drinking extra fluids if you are allowed can make your bowel movements softer. Foods high in fibre are whole grain cereals and bread, bran, fruits and vegetables.

Pain control medication that contains codeine such as Tylenol #2 or Tylenol # 3 can cause constipation. If you are taking a medication with codeine, your doctor may order medication to help prevent or treat constipation.

What activity can I do?

Deep breathing and circulation exercises are good. Try to avoid vigorous coughing if your repair was done with the open method. Coughing may strain your incision. For a couple of weeks, when you need to cough or sneeze, splint your incision. This means putting pressure over your incision with your hands, a rolled up blanket, or a pillow. Sneeze with your mouth open to lessen the strain on your incision.

Please ask your nurse to help you the first time you get up. You will need to learn how to get up in a way that prevents straining.

Moving and walking every day will:

- decrease breathing problems
- help your bowels become active and prevent constipation
- help blood move around your body

Gradually return to your normal activities when you feel comfortable.

You can resume sexual activity when you feel comfortable.

How do I care for my incision(s)?

You may shower the day after surgery. Pat your incision(s) dry after your shower. If your bandage or tape falls off or gets wet, replace it with a dry gauze dressing or surgical paper tape. You can have a tub bath when your incision(s) are healed.

When can I go back to work?

When you return to work will depend on the type of repair you had done and the type of work you do. Please talk about this with your doctor or health care provider.

Turn over →

When should I see my surgeon again?

You should have a follow-up appointment with your surgeon after surgery. If you do not have an appointment, contact your surgeon's office.

Contact your surgeon if you have:

- increased swelling or redness at an incision
- persistent bleeding, discharge or a foul smell from an incision
- an incision that bulges or opens
- a fever greater than 38°C or 100°F
- ongoing pain or pain that gets worse
- no bowel movement after 3 days
- chest pain or shortness of breath

