

### What is an inguinal hernia?

The groin (inguinal region) is an area of weakness in the body wall. In men, the blood vessels and vas (carrying sperm) to and from the testicle pass through the body wall here.

In some, the muscles are naturally weak and may give way (resulting in a hernia) in young adults or even childhood. In others, the weakness comes on slowly, often in later life. It can suddenly appear as a result of straining or exercise.

A hernia is when the tissues of the inner body wall (and sometimes the bowel inside the body) poke through the outer layers of the wall at this weakness.

### Why does a hernia need to be repaired?

Not all hernias need repairing. Some can be left alone and either ignored or treated by simple supports.

Hernias may be repaired if they are causing pain or discomfort or interfering with work or leisure activities.

Other hernias should be repaired even if they aren't causing problems because there is a risk of complications developing.

### What complications may happen to a hernia?

The main worry with any hernia is that a piece of bowel may get stuck in the hernia and swell up preventing it going back inside the body ('incarcerated'). If this happens the bowel may become blocked and the piece stuck in the hernia may even die due to the blood supply being cut off ('strangulated'). This requires an emergency operation on the hernia.

### How is it repaired?

The hernia is repaired by re-enforcing the body wall. The operation puts back any bowel or other tissue inside the hernia into its proper place. The weakness is then repaired with a piece of plastic mesh which is placed in between the layers of the body wall. This acts like a re-enforcing gusset and over time the body's own scar tissue also forms helping strengthen the repair. The mesh remains in place for life and should cause no problems since it is inert.

The placement of the mesh can be done in several different ways.

**'Mini' open repair** – The mesh is inserted through a mini incision in the groin. Unlike traditional hernia surgery which requires a long cut across the groin, the incision is usually around 1½ inches long. There is only a single scar low down in the groin usually just in the top line of the pubic hair.

**Laparoscopic 'keyhole' surgery** – The mesh is placed over the weakness from within the abdominal wall. Three small cuts (one at the belly button and two on each side of the abdominal wall) are used to access the hernia, make a 'space' between the abdominal lining and the weakness and secure the mesh with tiny 'tacks'. Keyhole operations avoid any cut in the groin but do need surgery to be performed through the main abdominal wall.

**Local anaesthetic surgery** – This can only be done for 'mini' open surgery and is particularly useful for patients where a general anaesthetic is best avoided.

Which type of surgery is best for you sometimes depends on medical history and previous surgery as well as patient's preference and can be discussed in detail prior to an operation.

### What to expect after the repair.

1. The groin area will be bruised and the discolouration may well spread into the top of the scrotum (the skin containing the testicle) – don't worry this is normal.
2. The skin at the top of the scrotum may feel numb afterwards. This is again normal due to the small nerves in the skin being effected by the operation.
3. The groin may feel 'tight' or stiff for a few weeks afterwards but this gradually fades with time.

### What can I do afterwards?

- The repair is sound from the time of surgery but takes several weeks for the scar tissue to settle. Until then anything which causes a strong strain on the body wall should be avoided. In general, don't do any lifting, digging or pulling which would cause you to take a deep breath to do it, for 6 weeks.
- Other than this, we encourage light exercise such as walking, easy swimming, playing golf etc. whenever you feel ready but best started soon after surgery. Don't spend too much time resting in bed as this doesn't help the repair.
- You may go back to work when you feel like it (most people have a week or so off) but you should not undertake any heavy duties for 6 weeks.
- You may not drive until any limiting discomfort from the scar has worn off. This usually means about 7 days.

- You may take a light shower or bath the day after you get home. Don't soak in the bath or let the wound get too wet for 7 days after the operation.

#### What complications may occur?

Simple bruising is common but occasionally a large blood clots collects under the skin or inside the abdomen if the operation was by keyhole surgery. If this happens you may need to be seen since although it usually does not need any further surgery, you may be given a course of antibiotics.

Infections of the scar are uncommon but if you develop redness, swelling or pain in the wound make an appointment to be seen. Very occasionally (fewer than 1% of cases), the plastic mesh itself becomes infected and the infection does not clear up despite antibiotics. This may mean the mesh has to be removed.

Great care is taken during the surgery to avoid injury to the blood vessels of the testicle. Serious damage to these happens fewer than 1 in 100 times but is more common if the hernia is being operated on for the second or more time. Laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery is associated with a very small risk (less than 1%) of damage to the tissues of the abdominal wall, damaged to the bowel or gas/air collecting in the tissues of the abdominal wall.

Scars, either in the groin or the keyhole scars, may be painful or oversensitive but this is no more than anywhere else on the body (about 1% of cases) .



# *Inguinal Hernia Repair*

## *Patient Information*

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