

Singh Surgical Partnership

Questions and Answers about Adult Abdominal herniae

What is a hernia?

A hernia when something moves from where it should be to another site.

How is a hernia diagnosed?

The history of a lump coming and going in a typical site usually signifies a hernia. The lump can normally be pushed back (reduced). In difficult cases an ultrasound may be required to establish the diagnosis.

Why have I got a hernia?

A hernia occurs in a site where there is a weakness and pressure pushes an organ or tissue through the area. It occurs commonly in the groin but also through the belly button and previous scars. As one gets older tissues weaken and increased pressure, e.g. lifting, strenuous activity, prolonged coughing, straining to pass a motion, straining to pass urine etc will promote hernia formation.

Do I need to have it repaired?

If a hernia is not causing problems, pain and easily appears and disappears with direct pressure it can be left alone. It may however enlarge over time.

What happens if I leave it?

The hernia will enlarge with time and may start to cause symptoms e.g. pain, discomfort and the hernia becomes more difficult to push back

What is strangulation?

The hernia becomes strangulated when the hernia protrudes and will not go back resulting in a painful, tender and tense lump. The pain is continuous and severe. The contents of the hernia will have lost its blood supply and without emergency treatment become gangrenous and life threatening. If this happens seek urgent medical advice or attend your local emergency department. **DO NOT DELAY.**

When is a hernia repair an emergency?

Urgent repair is required if the hernia strangulates

How should it be repaired?

Most herniae are now repaired tension free (without pulling things together to close the hole) with mesh. This technique reduces pain and speeds recovery.

The repair can be either open with an incision over the hernia or using laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery using small incisions further away from the hernia site. The British Hernia Society recommends that bilateral (both sides) and recurrent groin herniae should be repaired by keyhole surgery. A single sided or different type of hernia may be repaired either way but should be repaired by an experienced hernia surgeon regularly performing these types of procedures. Your G.P. will be in the best position to advise you accordingly. Keyhole surgery is performed under general anaesthetic (GA) and open surgery may be done either under GA or local anaesthesia.

What are the complications of a hernia repair?

Complications after hernia surgery are uncommon but may include, infection, numbness under the wound, bleeding from the wound, swelling due to bleeding under the incision, bruising, recurrence, damage to the blood supply of the testicle, breakdown of the surgical incision, and long term pain.

What can I do while I am waiting for surgery?

You can do anything you wish as long as it does not produce pain. You may be advised to wear a truss/support. The latter covers the hernia and keeps it in the correct position.

What can I do immediately after surgery?

The mesh takes 2 weeks to incorporate (become fixed in the body tissues), during this time it is important that patients be as normal as possible, take painkillers as required but do nothing strenuous. The incisions are normally closed with an absorbable stitch and/or glue. Patients can bath or shower immediately after surgery.

What is the recovery time after surgery?

Normal activity can be resumed after 2 weeks including return to work. It may be uncomfortable and maybe even painful, it should not however cause any harm if the mesh is positioned correctly. By 6 weeks most patients are more or less back to normal.

When can I drive after surgery?

You can drive when you can perform an emergency stop without hesitating because of pain and control the car without too much pain and discomfort. After a simple groin hernia repair it is usually 10 days.

What can I do once I have fully recovered?

The strength of the repair should allow you to return to complete normality.