

Laparoscopic Inguinal Hernia Repair

This guide will help answer many of the frequently asked questions about hernias.

What is a hernia?

A hernia is a weakness in the muscles of the abdomen. This can allow some bowel or fat around the bowel to push through the hole and form a bulge in the groin.

Men have a slight weakness in this area because blood vessels and spermatic cord need to reach the testes. This is why hernias are more common in men.



Photo of a man with the bulge of a small groin hernia (arrowed)

How do hernias occur?

Most hernias start after a period of lifting, straining or coughing. This can weaken the groin muscles, cause pain and allow a hernia to bulge through. Hernias are more common in people with heavy manual jobs and become more frequent as you get older.

Do I need an operation to fix it?

Once a hernia has developed, the weakness will always remain – unless it is repaired. Some patients choose not to have an operation, perhaps because of ill health. In this situation a truss may control the hernia by keeping it pushed back inside the abdomen.

How is a laparoscopic hernia performed?

Before your operation you will meet your surgeon. They will examine you, mark your hernia, and explain the operation in detail. A laparoscopic hernia repair operation is performed with you asleep (under general anaesthetic).

The principle of the repair is to use key-hole surgery to dissect the space under the muscle layer to identify the hole or weakness within the groin.

A cut is made at the umbilicus (tummy button) to allow the gas to inflate the abdominal wall. Two additional tiny cuts are made lower in the abdomen to pass in the instruments to fix the hernia. The hernia sac is pulled back inside the abdomen and a gauze mesh is placed over the defect. This mesh stays in the body and encourages scar tissue to form and prevents the hernia from coming out. No staples or stitches are needed on the inside. Dissolving stitches are usually used for the small cuts in the skin.

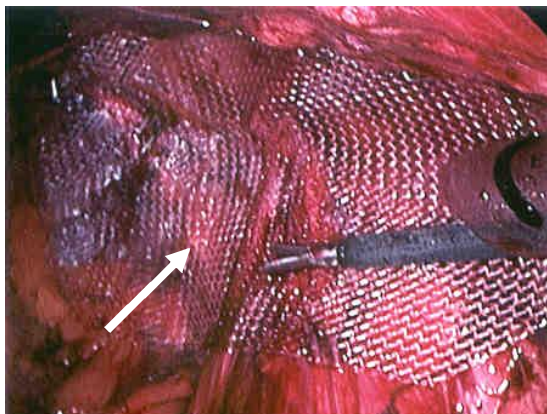


Photo of a laparoscopic hernia being repaired using a mesh (arrowed)

Occasionally a second hernia is found on the other side (contra-lateral occult hernia) and if so, this will be repaired at the same time. There are no additional scars in repairing both sides and you should still be able to go home on the same day of surgery.

How long am I in hospital?

After a laparoscopic hernia operation, most people are able to go home on the day of their operation if there is a responsible adult who will be with them. Your specialist will help advise you whether a day-case operation will be suitable for you.

What is the success rate of the operation?

Laparoscopic hernia operations are very successful when performed by trained specialist surgeons. The chance of a hernia coming back (a recurrence) is less than 2%. Hernias are more likely to return in patients with infections or in those who do too much heavy lifting too quickly.

What are the risks or complications?

The risk of the hernia recurring is less than 2%. Hernia operations may cause some bruising in the groin or some bleeding near the scars. Your leg and groin may feel stiff and uncomfortable for a few weeks after the operation. A few patients (less than 1%) experience long-term groin pain. This may need further tests or investigations.

General anaesthetics are very safe although all operations do carry a small risk. If you are concerned about an anaesthetic please speak to your specialist.

What can I do afterwards?

As a rule - "in the first month, if you can't lift it easily with one hand, you shouldn't lift it at all".

In the first four weeks you should take gentle exercise (walking) as stiffness permits. After a month you can start more demanding exercise although you must build up to full strength gradually. Most people need one week off work after a laparoscopic hernia operation. Patients with strenuous manual work may need 4-6 weeks before they can return to full duties.

When can I drive after a hernia operation?

Do not drive for 24 hours after a general anaesthetic. You need to be able to do an emergency stop without pain to drive safely. This usually takes about a week after a laparoscopic hernia operation.

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