

Overview

A hernia repair is a surgical procedure used to correct a hernia. A hernia is a bulging of internal organs or tissues. An External Hernia protrudes through an abnormal opening in the muscle wall, while an Internal Hernia is tissue trapped in an abnormal opening inside the belly cavity. Hernia repair is one of the most common operations done the United States. Almost 700,000 are performed each year. Common types of hernias include:

- » inguinal or femoral hernias, located in the groin
- » umbilical hernias, located at the belly button
- » incisional hernias, which form at the site of an earlier surgery

Who is a candidate for the procedure?

Any person who has a hernia that is causing discomfort may consider this surgery. Usually a hernia repair is done by choice. However, a hernia that is painful and cannot be pushed back into place may need emergency surgery. This is to prevent tissue death. People with significant health problems may be advised not to have hernia repair unless it is necessary.

How is the procedure performed?

Hernia repairs are usually done in a same day surgery setting. This means the person will return home the same day. Two methods are used to perform a hernia repair: traditional repair. In this technique, surgery is done from the outside of the body. A cut is made through the skin over the hernia. The intestine or other tissue is pushed back into the abdominal cavity. The weakened or torn muscle is repaired with stitches. Sometimes, the surgeon will strengthen the area with a patch made of a synthetic material. Local anesthesia is usually used for this type of surgery. General anesthesia or regional anesthesia can also be used. Laparoscopic repair: This type of operation is done using a tiny telescope called a laparoscope. It is linked to a special camera. The device allows the doctor to see the hernia on a video screen. A cut is made in the skin to insert the device. Other small cuts are made, as well. These let the doctor insert long-handled tools into the body. He or she can then repair the hernia from behind the wall of the abdomen. Three or four quarter-inch cuts are usually needed. A small piece of mesh is placed over the hernia. This is held in place with small staples. Most of the time, general anesthesia is used. This surgery leaves smaller scars than traditional repair.

What happens right after the procedure?

The person will be taken to the surgery recovery room. He or she may feel some discomfort. This can be relieved with pain medication. The person can begin to drink fluids if there is no stomach upset. He or she can often go home in a few hours.

What happens later at home?

Once home after hernia surgery, the person should:

- » avoid strenuous activity, including lifting, for 3 to 6 weeks
- » slowly advance his or her diet from clear liquids to a normal diet
- » slowly increase activity
- » avoid straining during bowel movements

Most people are ready to go back to work a few days after laparoscopic surgery.

What are the potential complications after the procedure?

A small number of people suffer side effects after hernia repair surgery. These can include:

- » infection around the incision
- » breathing problems
- » trouble urinating
- » bleeding
- » recurrent herniation
- » adhesions, or scar tissue, in the abdominal cavity which can cause pain