



# The Truth About **HERNIAS.** Spotting and treating them.

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## Spotting and treating them.

You probably don't think much (if at all) about how your intestines and organs stay in their proper places. Your peritoneum, the muscular wall that keeps abdominal organs in place, takes care of that for you. However, when you overstrain or have a weak spot in your muscles, there is a possibility that part of your organs, intestine, or other abdominal matter can push through the peritoneum. Any abnormal protrusion or bulge through the abdominal wall is called a hernia.



### Spotting a Hernia:

In many cases, hernias have no symptoms. That is why it is vital to keep up to date with your routine physical or medical exams – that is where it's most likely for a hernia to show up. Hernias are most common in the stomach, but can also appear in the upper thigh, belly button, and groin areas. The most common types of hernias are Epigastric, Incisional, Umbilical (navel), Inguinal (groin), and Femoral (upper thigh).

The diagram on the following page will give you a clearer description of how common hernias occur, along with the symptoms to look out for.



## INCISIONAL HERNIA

Occurs when a protrusion of tissue forms at the site of a healing surgical scar.

### Symptoms include:

- Redness and a burning sensation of a bulge near an old surgical incision
- Discomfort or sharp pain when lifting heavy objects or straining
- Constipation (due to intestinal obstruction)
- Nausea and/or vomiting

## INGUINAL HERNIA, A.K.A. GROIN HERNIA

Occurs when a structure in your abdomen bulges through your abdominal wall and into your inner groin. This is the most common type of hernia.

### Symptoms include:

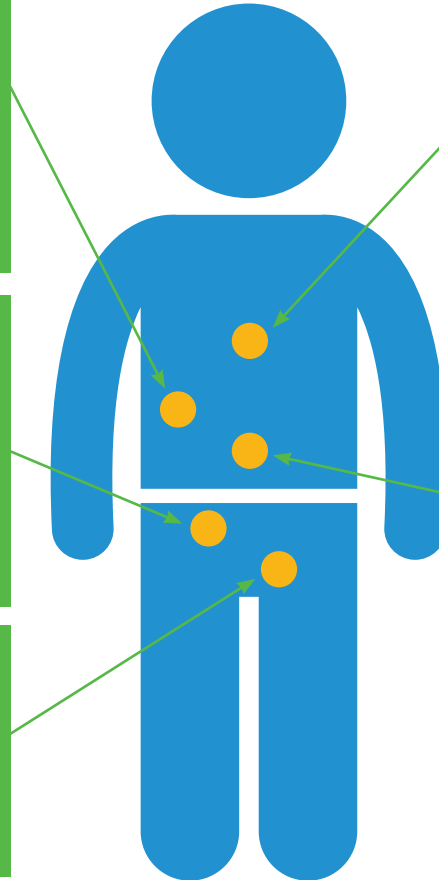
- Bulge on either side of your pubic bone
- Burning or aching sensation at the bulge
- Pain or discomfort in your groin, particularly when bending over or lifting

## FEMORAL HERNIA

Occurs when a weakness in the muscle of the groin allows the intestine to bulge through.

### Symptoms include:

- Severe stomach and/or hip pain that increases when standing up or straining in any way
- A heavy or dragging sensation in your groin



## THE TRUTH ABOUT HERNIAS

### EPIGASTRIC HERNIA

Occurs when a weakness in the abdominal muscle allows the tissues of the abdomen to push through the muscle.

### Symptoms include:

- Bulge or bump in the area below your sternum or breastbone (above your belly button)
- Tenderness and pain in the epigastric region
- It is common for this type of hernia to not show any symptoms

### UMBILICAL HERNIA

Occurs when part of your intestine sticks out through a weakness in the muscle around the umbilicus, or belly button.

### Symptoms include:

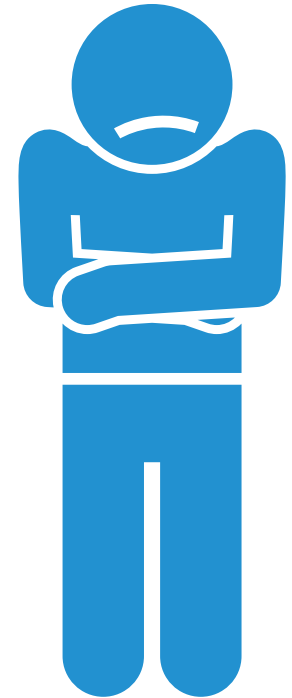
- A bulging lump in the abdomen, specifically near the navel area
- Fever
- Constipation

### Other Common Signs of Hernias Include:

- Feeling heaviness in the abdomen or bloating
- Heartburn and/or chest pain
- Trouble swallowing
- Difficulty urinating
- Pain while exercising, lifting, straining, and/or coughing or sneezing
- Itching, aching, burning in the groin area or swelling in the scrotum

Small and moderate-size hernias usually don't cause any symptoms. The quicker a hernia is detected and treated, the less likely that you will experience physically disabling pain or deterrents on your day-to-day activities.

**Hernias will not get better on their own.** Surgery is usually recommended even if it is not impeding on your lifestyle. Hernias left untreated can lead to life-threatening complications.



### Sports Hernias

A sports hernia is a painful groin injury, commonly known as “Athletic Pubalgia” to differentiate it from traditional hernias. While most hernias occur because tissues push through weak abdominal walls, a sports hernia refers to strains or injuries to the soft tissues of the groin or lower abdomen that occur when an athlete’s muscle is actively contracting due to quick and sudden change in direction including twisting, kicking, forcefully stretching, etc.

Sports hernias are injuries to soft tissues and therefore X-rays will not detect the actual injury. The pain is usually hard to pin point and can develop slowly.



The most common way to treat a sports hernia is to rest and/or avoid physical activity for the first 7-10 days after the injury, using ice treatments to reduce inflammation. If that is not successful, surgical procedures are recommended to repair the torn tissues.

Sports hernias are common in athletes who participate in soccer, football, hockey, tennis, and wrestling.

### Are You at Risk?

Hernias result from pressure on weak abdominal muscles. Sometimes, a person is born with this condition, and other times muscles weaken over time.

**This may happen due to:**

- Obesity
- Straining during urination or bowel movements
- Heavy lifting
- Chronic cough (common in smokers)
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Pregnancy
- Enlarged prostate
- Peritoneal dialysis
- Undescended testicles



### Treating a Hernia:

X-rays or MRI scans may be needed to determine whether or not you have a hernia. A variety of scans or tests are usually recommended to rule out other causes of pain and/or complications. In small cases you may wait to have surgery, although hernias usually get worse over time, as more tissue pushes through the affected muscle. In very rare cases, a painless hernia may never need repair. However, it's important to remember that a hernia (regardless of its size) will not heal on its own, and if it isn't managed properly it can lead to severe and potentially life-threatening complications.

You can medically treat a hernia with either open repair or laparoscopic surgery.





## Open Hernia Repair

Open repair refers to directly fixing the protrusion by making one large cut in the affected area, pushing the hernia bulge back into place, and sewing it shut. If the muscle tissue isn't healthy enough to stay shut, a piece of surgical mesh is inserted to reinforce the weakened tissues and provide extra support. General or local anesthesia is used for sedation.

## Laparoscopic Surgery

Laparoscopic surgery repairs a hernia in the same way that open surgery does, however instead of one large cut, tiny incisions are made, and a surgical tool called a laparoscope is used. A laparoscope is a slender tool with a tiny video camera and light on the end, that the surgeon will use to look at what's happening in your body (through a screen). Without it, he'd have to make a much larger opening. General anesthesia is used for sedation.

### What to Expect After Hernia Repair:

- Feeling tired easily during the first week or two
- Three weeks of recovery/down time. You'll probably be able to drive again in about two weeks and have sexual intercourse in about three weeks
- Resume light activity after three weeks
- Resume strenuous exercise after six weeks or when you have completely no pain
- Swelling or bruising around the areas of the incision(s)

### Call Your Doctor Immediately if:

- The incision is warm and/or red
- Excessive sweating
- A testicle is hard and swollen
- Difficulty urinating
- The wound is bleeding through your bandage
- Fever
- Your pain worsens



### Tips for Post-Surgery:

- Have a pillow handy to put over your abdomen for support in case you cough, sneeze, or vomit (which can be a side effect of anesthesia).
- If you're given a prescription for pain medication prior to the day of surgery, fill it, even if you don't think you'll need it.
- Eat foods high in fiber like fresh fruits and vegetables and drink lots of fluids. This will help avoid constipation (which can be caused by pain medication and inactivity) and the strain that goes with it. Ask your doctor about using a stool softener or laxative if you need it.

### Hernias may return after surgery, so preventive measures are especially important to help avoid a recurrence:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Avoid heavy lifting
- Don't smoke
- Avoid the chronic use of steroids



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