

FACTSHEET

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Inguinal hernia

What is an inguinal hernia?

An inguinal hernia is the bulging of a portion of an organ or tissue through an abnormal opening in the abdominal wall.

The hernia appears as a lump, which may come and go, in the child's groin. It appears or appears more noticeable when the child is crying or straining.

Sometimes the lump extends into the scrotum in a boy or into the labium in a girl.

Inguinal hernias are common and can occur at any age in children, however one third of hernias appear in the first 6 months of life. In premature infants the chance of having a hernia is increased. Boys are 4 times more likely than girls to have an inguinal hernia. The right side is more commonly affected in both sexes. In some cases, other family members may have had a hernia at birth or in infancy.

Inguinal hernias in children are not caused by muscle weakness. They rarely go away on their own. The younger the child, the more likely the hernia is to become stuck or "irreducible", (it becomes hard and cannot be pushed back in). Very young children need an operation soon after a hernia is identified because if an organ or tissue gets caught in the hernia, it can be seriously damaged.

The operation

The best management of inguinal hernia is surgical repair. Your child comes to hospital on the day of the operation and usually goes home the same day. Very young or premature babies may stay one night after the operation. During the operation, a small incision is made in the groin; the doctors return all bulging tissue back into the abdomen, and close the canal opening. All the stitches are under the

skin and dissolve by themselves. There will be a scar in the groin skin crease. As the child grows, the scar will fade but never completely disappear.

The operation can also be done with the key hole (laparoscopic) technique. Please discuss this with your surgeon.

What about activity after the operation?

Your child will naturally physically limit themselves. Most children return to normal activities without restriction within a few days. Your surgeon will advise you about any limitations on general living activity.

Is there pain after the operation?

Your child may have pain. Ask your doctor for advice on medication and dosage for use at home. Pain is not the only cause of distress after an operation. Fear, anxiety and hunger can all have an effect on your child. Comfort your child.

Will my child have to come back to hospital?

Your child will have to see the doctor for a check-up.

If your child develops painful swelling or fever, contact your surgeon or local doctor immediately.

Remember:

- Inguinal hernias need an operation. The younger the child, the sooner it is needed.
- If your child develops a painful groin or swelling, see a doctor straight away.
- After the operation, your child can play normally.