

Hernia FAQ's

What is a Hernia?

A hernia is a weakness or tear in the abdominal muscles or diaphragm that allows organs, such as intestines or fatty tissue, to extend through the weakened area. This can cause a noticeable bulge under the skin or symptoms of pain or discomfort, cosmetic concerns, and intestinal issues. Symptoms can worsen when standing for long periods or straining the abdominal muscles, such as when lifting heavy objects.

What Causes a Hernia?

Many hernias are the result of a defect or weakness in the abdominal wall that was present at birth. The area can be further weakened by age, injury, pregnancy, weight gain and especially by a previous surgical incision. Although some hernias are more common in men, they can develop in anyone. Risk factors for a hernia include:

- Chronic cough
- Smoking
- Obesity
- Family history
- Premature birth
- Straining while lifting heavy objects
- Straining during bowel movements or urination
- Pregnancy
- Certain medications such as steroids

How can I tell if I have a Hernia?

Think of a hernia as a bulge in a tire. The outer wall of the tire is like your abdominal wall. The inner tube of the tire is like your intestines. Most of the time, the outer wall of the tire is strong enough to hold the inner tube, but if the wall weakens, a bulge may occur. This is similar to the way a hernia might form in the abdominal wall or groin. Many hernias will present with symptoms. Often, however, a hernia may not be noticed until your doctor discovers it during a medical exam. Symptoms that people often report include:

- A clear bulge or bump in the groin area or abdomen or at the belly button
- Groin or abdominal discomfort, anytime or especially after working, straining, lifting or bending over – any activity that increases pressure in the abdomen
- Burning, aching or gurgling sensation in the groin or abdominal wall
- Pressure in the abdominal wall or groin

What should I do if I think I have a hernia?

If you have any symptoms of a hernia or are concerned you might have one, see your primary care doctor. After listening to your history and symptoms, he or she can decide if you need to have any tests done or if you need to see a surgeon. Symptoms from a hernia usually get worse over time, but sometimes the hernia has no symptoms until it becomes trapped. A trapped or “incarcerated” hernia could become an emergency and should not be ignored.



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