

Fact Sheet

Inguinal hernia



What is an inguinal hernia?

An inguinal hernia occurs when the bowel slides through an open canal into a pouch in the groin called the hernial sac. This appears as a lump in the child's groin. Sometimes the lump goes down into the scrotum in a boy or into the labium in a girl.

Inguinal hernias are common in childhood, especially in boys. Inguinal hernias in children are not caused by muscle weakness. They are not caused by letting your baby cry, although they are more noticeable when your baby is upset.

These hernias do not go away on their own. Very young children need an operation as soon as a hernia appears because if the bowel gets caught in the hernia, it can be damaged. Operation is not so urgent in older children.

The operation

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, the doctors stitch the open canal, remove the hernial sac inside and close the opening in the groin. This is done under general anaesthetic. The stitches are beneath 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.

What about activity after the operation?

Your child can play normally after the operation. Vigorous play should be discouraged during the first week after the operation. Many children may be playing and running the next day. This will not affect the healing of the wound.

Your surgeon will give advice about showering or bathing.

Is there pain after the operation?

Your child will need pain relief. This may be given before leaving hospital. 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. Try to stay calm and comfort your child.

Will my child have to come back to hospital?

Your child will have to come back to the doctor in three to six weeks 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 swelling, see a doctor straight away.
- After the operation, your child can play normally.

This fact sheet is for education purposes only. Please consult with your doctor or other health professional to make sure this information is right for your child.

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