

Fact Sheet

Umbilical hernia



What is an umbilical hernia?

Umbilical hernias are common in babies and are due to delayed closure of a small opening in the abdominal wall at the umbilicus (belly button). Umbilical hernias rarely cause serious problems in childhood and may be left alone to close naturally. This opening has the potential to close for some years.

Strapping the hernia does not help it to close more quickly (and it may be dangerous).

Will my child need an operation?

If the hernia has not gone by the time your child is about five years old, your child may need an operation. There is literature evidence that closure goes on for six to seven years. The operation involves closing the opening with stitches and is done under general anaesthetic. As umbilical hernias can have serious complications in adults, an operation is usually recommended in childhood if the hernia does not close by itself. An operation is not always necessary.

How long does it take?

Your child comes to hospital on the day of the operation and is usually home the same day. Children usually spend about an hour in the operating theatre. This includes the time spent giving the anaesthetic and preparing your child for the operation, as well as waking up after the operation.

Where will the scar be?

The scar, while it never completely disappears, is usually quite difficult to see. It will be just below or in the belly button and fades after six to twelve months. The stitches are under the skin and they dissolve by themselves.

After the operation

Your child can play normally after the operation. Many children will be playing and running the next day. This will not affect the healing of the wound. The dressing should be removed after three to ten days - your doctor will advise you about this and showering and bathing.

Your child will need to come back to the doctor for a check-up.

Is there pain after the operation?

Your child will need pain relief. This may be given before leaving the hospital - ask your doctor for advice on medication and dosage. Pain is not the only cause of distress after an operation. Fear, anxiety and hunger can all contribute.

Try to stay calm and comfort your child. Most children also feel calmer and more comfortable when they get home.

Remember

- Most umbilical hernias go away by two- five years of age and do not need an operation.
- The operation can be safely performed in one day.
- 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.

This document was reviewed on 13th March 2009.

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