

The Hernia Clinic

Femoral Hernia Repair

Your doctor has diagnosed a femoral hernia of the groin. You have been given this leaflet to provide information about your condition. This guide will help answer many of the frequently asked questions about hernias.

What is a hernia?

A hernia is a weakness in the muscles of the abdomen. This can allow some bowel or fat around the bowel to push through the hole and form a bulge in the groin.

Hernias may cause problems in both men and women, but femoral hernias are more common in women.



Diagram of a woman with a right femoral hernia of the groin (arrowed)

How do hernias occur?

These hernias are much more common in advancing years and in women. The first sign of a femoral hernia is a lump within the groin. This may develop after a period of lifting or coughing. In some patients the lump may still remain prominent despite rest and lying down.

Occasionally the hernia lump may become very painful. This may be a sign of a strangulated hernia. This is an emergency and usually requires immediate medical attention.

Do I need an operation to fix it?

Femoral hernias are nearly always repaired due to the risk of strangulation. The operation is usually performed under general anaesthetic through a small scar low in the groin. The hernia bulge is pushed back into place and the defect (hole) is closed with permanent stitches. Absorbable stitches are used to close the skin.

What happens if I choose not to have it repaired?

Over time a hernia may become bigger and more troublesome. Sometimes bowel may become trapped in the hernia. This is a strangulated hernia. Femoral hernias are particularly prone to this serious complication

What is a strangulated hernia?

If bowel becomes stuck in the hernia it may become blocked and trapped. If this happens the hernia bulge may become warm, red and painful to touch. You may also feel sick or vomit. This is a medical emergency and you should contact your GP or attend the Accident and Emergency department.

How is the operation performed?

Before your operation you will meet your surgeon. They will examine you, mark your hernia, and explain the operation in detail. A hernia repair operation is usually performed with you asleep (under general anaesthetic). Sometimes hernias are repaired with you awake (under local anaesthetic) or with you numb from the waist down.

A cut is made in the groin near the bulge, and the defect identified. The hole in the femoral canal is closed with permanent stitches. Mesh is not normally required. This scar tissue ensures the hernia repair stays strong. Dissolving stitches are usually used for the skin.

How long am I in hospital?

Most people are able to go home on the day of their operation provided there is a responsible adult who will be with them for 24 hours after the operation. Your specialist will help advise you whether a day-case operation will be suitable for you.

What is the success rate of the operation?

Hernia operations are very successful when performed by trained specialist surgeons. The chance of a hernia coming back (a recurrence) is less than 2%. Hernias are more likely to return in patients with infections or in those who do too much heavy lifting too quickly.

What are the risks or complications?

The risk of the hernia recurring is less than 2%. Groin hernia operations may cause some bleeding and bruising near the scar. Your leg and groin may feel stiff and uncomfortable for a few weeks after the operation. A few patients (less than 1%) experience long-term groin pain. This may need further tests or investigations.

General anaesthetics are very safe although all operations do carry a small risk. If you are concerned about an anaesthetic please speak to your specialist.

What can I do afterwards?

As a rule - "in the first month, if you can't lift it easily with one hand, you shouldn't lift it at all".

In the first four weeks you should take gentle exercise (walking) as stiffness permits. After a month you can start more demanding exercise although you must build up to full strength gradually.

Most people need one or two weeks off work after a hernia operation. Patients with strenuous manual work may need 4-6 weeks before they can return to full duties.

When can I drive after a hernia operation?

Do not drive for 24 hours after a general anaesthetic. You need to be able to do an emergency stop without pain to drive safely. This usually takes 1-2 weeks after a groin hernia operation.

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