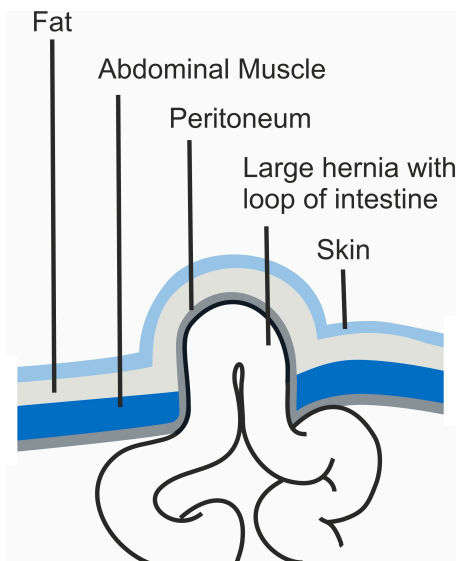


## How do I know if I have a hernia?



A hernia is a defect/hole or weakness in the abdominal wall that allows bowel or fat to push through. This creates the bulge that you may see or feel.

Hernia can be present at birth or develop over time.

There are several known risk factors for developing a hernia. These include age, smoking, obesity, repeated straining, chronic coughing or sneezing, and frequent heavy lifting.

Most hernias become less noticeable when you lie down. This happens because the bulge goes back in as the bowel moves through the hole in the abdominal wall. Hernias can occur in different areas. They are most common in the groin and abdomen. A hernia in the groin is called an inguinal or femoral hernia. A hernia in the abdominal area is often called a ventral hernia. A hernia that forms at the site of a previous abdominal surgery is called an incisional hernia.

### Info



If you think you have a hernia, you should see your GP. They will usually examine you. They may arrange a scan if needed to confirm the diagnosis, size, and location of the hernia. This may help before referring you to a surgeon. However, not everyone with a hernia needs a scan, especially if the hernia is clearly visible.

## Is there anything I can do to help myself?

The time between your diagnosis and your appointment with the surgeon is a chance to prepare for surgery. Taking steps now can improve your chances of a successful outcome. If you need to lose weight, it's best to start as soon as possible. You can ask your GP for support, such as a referral to a healthy lifestyle program. If you smoke, consider asking for a referral to a stop-smoking service.

There is no need to wait until you see the surgeon as this may take some time.

# My hernia is painful, is there anything I can do to ease the pain?

Hernias can be uncomfortable and some people do find them painful. Large hernias may affect mobility. A support garment can help with movement and has been shown to reduce pain. If your hernia is painful, talk to your GP. They might recommend medication to help manage discomfort as you prepare for surgery. If your symptoms suddenly get worse, contact your GP or surgeon for further assessment.

## Can I fly and go on holiday with a hernia?

If your hernia can be pushed back in (reducible) and is not at risk of complications, you can usually fly and go on holiday. However, you should get medical advice before travelling.



### Warning

You must also **inform your travel insurance company** about your hernia.

## Can I exercise whilst I have a hernia?

Yes. You can still exercise while preparing for surgery. In fact, staying as fit and healthy as possible will be beneficial.

You may need to adjust your workouts and listen to your body. This might mean using lighter weights with more repetitions. If a movement causes pain, stop and try again another time.

Walking is a great way to stay active. Spending time outdoors can also boost your mental well-being. If mobility is a challenge, there are still exercises you can do. Any activity that raises your heart rate and boosts your metabolism will help with fitness and weight loss.



### Info

Some people with large hernias find that wearing a hernia support garment or abdominal binder makes exercise more comfortable.

## Are there any dietary restrictions for hernia?

There are no strict dietary requirements, but eating a healthy diet can help. Make sure to include plenty of fibre and protein in your meals. Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated. This will help keep your bowels moving regularly.



### Info

If you have a large hernia, you may find it easier to eat smaller meals more often instead of large meals.

# What is a hernia support garment?

A hernia support garment can help while you prepare for surgery. Some people find that it supports the hernia and reduces pain, both before and after the operation. These garments can be expensive. It's important to choose one that suits your hernia. For small lower abdominal or groin hernias, some people find that compression underwear helps. These are available in high street stores.

In some cases, hernia support garments may be available on prescription through your GP. You can ask them for advice on what might be suitable for you.



## Info

There are many suppliers of support wear, but some include: *Vanilla Blush*, *Orthotix*, and *Suportx*. It is also possible to buy tailor-made binders.

# What are the warning signs with hernia?

Sometimes, a part of the bowel can become trapped in the hernia sac (the bulge you see and feel). This is a serious condition that needs emergency treatment.



## Warning

If your hernia does not go back in when you lie down and you experience a severe increase in pain, fever, or cannot pass gas or have bowel movements, seek medical attention immediately.

It's important to get to know your hernia, how you feel day to day and after certain tasks. This will help you notice any changes quickly.

# Is surgery the only way to repair my hernia?

Yes. The only way to repair a hernia and close the hole is through surgery. However, hernias are usually not harmful. In many cases, there is no urgent need for surgery.

If your hernia is small and not affecting your daily life, your surgeon may recommend watchful waiting. This means you monitor it at home instead of having immediate surgery.

For small hernias, a general surgeon can usually perform the repair. However, large or recurring hernias are best treated by surgeons with specialist experience in hernia repair.

# My GP has referred me to see a surgeon, what will happen at this appointment?

When you see the surgeon, they will ask about your hernia and how it affects your daily life. To get the most from your appointment, write down any information you want to share in advance.



## Scan the QR code

To see an example form used when referring patients to a specialist hernia service

Appointments can feel overwhelming, so having everything written down can help both you and your surgeon.

During the appointment, the surgeon will examine your hernia. This may feel slightly uncomfortable when they press on your abdomen, but it should not be painful.

## Why has the surgeon asked me to lose weight?

Being overweight increases the risk of common health conditions, like high blood pressure, diabetes, and sleep apnoea. These conditions can raise the risk of complications after hernia surgery.

Losing weight can reduce the risk of complications after surgery. This includes wound infections, breathing problems, and others.

Having anaesthesia whilst overweight can be more complicated. The anaesthetist may have difficulty finding a vein to insert a cannula. A cannula is needed to give you medication. During surgery, higher gas pressure is required to help you breathe properly. This can sometimes irritate the lungs, making it harder to breathe during recovery. Anaesthetic drugs dissolve in fat. If you have more body fat, you may need a higher dose. This can cause the drugs to stay in your system longer, making it take more time to wake up after surgery. In some cases, it increases the risk of breathing problems or lung infections.

We understand that losing weight can be difficult. The key message is to focus on improving your fitness. This means eating fewer calories while increasing your activity levels. Getting fitter will help improve your recovery and overall health before surgery.

# What is prehabilitation ("prehab")?

Prehab is the process of preparing both your body and mind for surgery. Research shows that it can help improve recovery and reduce the risk of complications after surgery.



## Smoking

Quitting smoking before surgery helps your lungs work better and reduces the risk of complications.



## Weight management

Reaching a healthy weight lowers your risk of complications during and after surgery.



## Physical activity

Regular exercise improves fitness and muscle strength. This makes surgery and recovery easier.



## Diabetes control

Keeping blood sugar levels stable lowers the risk of infections and other complications.



## Alcohol reduction

Drinking less alcohol supports liver function, helps with weight management, and improves overall recovery.



## Mental wellbeing

A positive mindset and stress management can make a big difference in your recovery. Mental well-being is an important part of preparing for surgery.

# Why do I need to stop smoking before I have hernia surgery?

Smoking almost triples the risk of developing a surgical site infection. Cigarettes contain chemicals that reduce blood flow. Blood flow is needed for proper healing. Poor blood flow can lead to slower wound healing, longer recovery times, and increased scarring.

Smoking also raises the risk of hernia recurrence by more than 30%.

In addition, smoking increases the risk of complications from anaesthesia. You may need higher doses of anaesthetic drugs. It might take longer to recover. Cigarette smoke contains toxic chemicals, like nicotine and carbon monoxide. These can increase the risk of serious heart and circulation problems after surgery, including heart attacks and strokes.

## What should I expect if I'm having a general anaesthetic?



### Info

Most hernia operations are performed under general anaesthetic. This means you will be asleep during the surgery and will not feel any pain.

### Here is what you can expect:

- **Before surgery:** You will meet the anaesthetist, who will assess your health and explain the anaesthetic process. They will ask about any medications, allergies, or past experiences with anaesthesia.
- **Going to sleep:** A small plastic tube (called a cannula) will be placed into a vein, usually in your hand or arm. The anaesthetic medicine is given through this.
- **During the operation:** The anaesthetist stays with you throughout the procedure. They monitor your breathing, heart rate, and other vital signs closely to keep you safe and comfortable.
- **Waking up:** After surgery, you will wake up in the recovery area. You may feel a bit drowsy or confused at first, but this is normal and wears off over time.
- **After-effects:** Some people experience a sore throat (from the breathing tube), nausea, or dizziness. These symptoms are usually mild and temporary.

Your anaesthetist will discuss any specific risks related to your individual health and answer any questions you have. Anaesthesia today is very safe, and serious complications are rare.

# How long will I need to be in hospital?

It's best to discuss this with your surgeon. The length of your hospital stay will depend on the type of hernia and the complexity of your surgery.

Small inguinal or umbilical hernias are usually treated as "day cases". This means you can go home the same day.

Larger hernias may require a hospital stay, but your surgeon will explain what to expect.

If you have a complex hernia or other medical needs, you may need to stay in hospital for several days. This might sometimes be up to five days or more.

# How long will I need to take off work?

The amount of time off work you will need after surgery depends on several factors. It depends on the type of hernia surgery and your work. For example, manual workers may need more time off than office workers. Your employer has a duty of care to ensure you can return to work safely. They should make reasonable adjustments if needed. You must be sure your return does not put yourself, your employer, or colleagues at risk. Discuss this with your surgeon during your consultation or informed consent process.

## Info



You should consider whether you have someone at home to help you in the first few weeks after surgery. This is a time to rely on family or friends for support. Do not be shy in asking for help.

# What is Informed Consent?



Informed consent is an important part of your consultation before hernia surgery. The surgeon will explain everything you need to know before your surgery. You should receive details of any options, and potential risks. The goal is to make sure you understand the procedure. It is important you feel confident in your decision before agreeing to surgery.

# Will I need mesh to repair my hernia?

Mesh repair is the recommended method for fixing most hernias. However, some small umbilical hernias may be fixed without mesh. You need to discuss these options with your surgeon.

For groin (inguinal) hernias, some surgical units offer mesh-free repair. However, this method has a higher chance of the hernia coming back (recurrence).

If you prefer a mesh-free repair, it is important to choose a surgeon who is experienced in this technique.

# Is mesh safe?

Yes. It's important to remember that millions of hernia repairs are done worldwide each year. The vast majority of patients have successful surgeries and go on to live active, healthy lives.

There has been some debate about the safety of mesh products. But, these materials have strict safety testing before they can be used in surgery. Many concerns raised in the media or on social media are not due to the mesh itself.



## Success

Thanks to improvements in surgical methods and mesh technology, hernia surgery is now safer than ever.

Your surgeon will discuss the type of mesh they plan to use, explaining why it is the best option for you. They will recommend a product they are experienced with, confident in using, and believe will provide the best repair.

# Why do surgeons use “Botox” before abdominal wall hernia surgery?

Botulinum toxin is a type of neurotoxin. It temporarily weakens muscles by blocking their ability to contract. In hernia surgery, especially for larger hernias, this can help the surgeon repair the hernia more easily.

You may have heard of Botox®, a well-known brand of botulinum toxin A. There are other brands available that may be used.

Your surgeon will likely give you six injections (three on each side) a few weeks before surgery. The injections are not painful, but they can be uncomfortable. They are guided by ultrasound to ensure they are placed correctly.

A few days after the injections, you may notice that your abdomen looks different as the muscles start to relax. If your abdomen feels heavier than usual, you may find a support garment helpful. Some patients experience temporary shortness of breath or feel like they can't take a full breath. This is usually mild and will improve over time.

It is also believed that Botulinum Toxin A may help reduce post-surgery pain.

# What is PPP?

Preoperative Progressive Pneumoperitoneum (PPP) is a technique used before hernia surgery. It is used by specialised hernia centres. PPP involves gradually increasing the abdomen with air or carbon dioxide. It might make the repair easier and reduce the risk of complications.

# What is laparoscopic surgery?

Laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery is performed under general anaesthetic. The surgeon will make a few small cuts (incisions) in your abdomen and insert surgical instruments.

To create space for the procedure, your abdomen is inflated with carbon dioxide. This helps the surgeon see the hernia clearly and repair it from the inside. The hernia defect (hole) is closed. Then, a mesh is placed over it to strengthen the repair. Once the surgery is done, the carbon dioxide is released from your body.

There are two main types of laparoscopic groin hernia repair:

- **TAPP (Trans-Abdominal Pre-Peritoneal)** – Instruments are placed inside the abdominal cavity.
- **TEP (Totally Extra-Peritoneal)** – The abdominal cavity is not entered. Instead, the surgery takes place between the muscles and the peritoneum (the lining of the abdomen).

Your surgeon will discuss which method is best for you. These terms are most commonly used when talking about groin hernia surgery.

# What is robot assisted hernia surgery?

Robot-assisted hernia repair is similar to laparoscopic (keyhole) surgery. The surgeon makes several small incisions in your abdomen to insert the robotic arms. Your abdomen is then filled with carbon dioxide to create space for the procedure.

During surgery, the surgeon sits at a console next to the operating table. They control the robotic arms to repair the hernia. This procedure is performed inside the abdominal cavity.

The robotic arms are fully controlled by the surgeon. They can move in a full 360-degree range, providing a detailed view of the abdomen. This allows for precise repair of the hernia defect. Once the hole is closed, a mesh is placed over it to strengthen the repair.

# What is open hernia surgery?

Open surgery is when the surgeon makes a single incision in your abdomen to access the abdominal wall hernia.

The hernia defect (hole) is closed, and a mesh is placed over it to strengthen the repair. The surgeon then closes the incision.

Your surgeon will decide the best type of repair for you. This will be based on the size and complexity of the hernia and the techniques they are familiar with.

# How long will it take me to recover from hernia surgery?

All surgery involves some pain, and hernia surgery is no different. You will have some discomfort at first. Your surgeon will have a plan in place to help manage pain and discomfort. The pain should slowly improve each day.

If you are discharged on the same day as your surgery, you should have someone stay with you for at least 24–48 hours.

Try not to worry if your recovery feels slow. Healing takes time. Recovery time varies from person to person. Even for a small hernia repair, full recovery can take several weeks. Larger hernia repairs may take several months before you feel fully back to normal.

## What will my scar look like?

If you have laparoscopic (keyhole) or robot-assisted surgery, you will have several small incisions in your abdomen. If you have open surgery, there will be one larger incision, depending on the type and size of your hernia.

For larger or umbilical hernias, the belly button may be lost during the repair. If this is important to you, speak to your surgeon before surgery to discuss your options.

## How do I care for my incisions?

This will depend on how your incision is closed. If you have permanent sutures or staples, you will need an appointment to have them removed.

Some surgeons use dissolvable sutures, which do not need to be removed.

To help healing, keep your incisions clean and dry for at least the first few days. When you shower, avoid perfumed soaps or lotions near the incision.

If your incision is closed with glue, it will gradually dissolve on its own, forming a protective seal. You can shower whenever you feel ready.

## What are the warning signs I should be aware of after surgery?

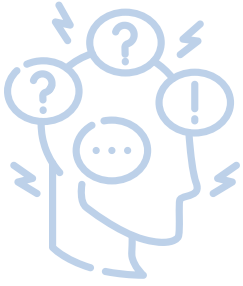


### Warning

If you develop a fever or notice that your incision becomes red, hot, itchy, swollen, or more painful, contact your GP. This may be a sign of infection.

Some patients develop a seroma. A seroma is a fluid collection in the space where the hernia used to be. Seromas are common. They usually disappear on their own within a few weeks as the body reabsorbs the fluid.

# Anxiety



It's completely normal to feel nervous or anxious before surgery. Many people worry about not being in control, not knowing what to expect, or whether the surgery will be successful.

Anxiety can affect both your mind and body, leading to symptoms such as:

- Headaches
- Indigestion
- Mood changes
- Fatigue or memory loss
- Increased heart rate
- Changes in appetite – some people gain weight due to comfort eating, while others lose weight due to reduced appetite
- Reduced sex drive

These feelings can be distressing, especially when you want to be in the best possible health before surgery.

## How to Manage Anxiety Before Surgery

- Avoid smoking or drinking alcohol as a way to cope with stress.
- Talk to someone—share your feelings with family, friends, your GP, or surgeon.
- Focus on the benefits of surgery. After a hernia repair, you should be pain-free and able to enjoy hobbies and activities without restrictions.
- Stick to a routine—make time for yourself, go for walks, or exercise. Physical activity releases serotonin, a hormone that boosts mood.
- Join a support group—connect with others who understand what you're going through. One option is the Hernia Patient Support Group on Facebook. The group is run by experienced hernia surgeons and patient representatives. They can offer advice and reassurance.



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