

# HERNIA

*“I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move.”* Matthew 17:20

While there are many types of hernias, this article will focus on the inguinal hernia. An inguinal hernia occurs when there is a weakness in the stomach muscle, which eventually becomes a hole. 75% of all abdominal (stomach) hernias occur in the inguinal, or groin, area. The intestines are normally safe inside us behind our stomach muscles. When the tear, or hole, occurs, fatty tissue and sometimes intestines are allowed to slide out through this opening. Activities, such as coughing, straining, and lifting causes an increase in the pressure inside the abdomen, and will worsen the hernia.

The first symptom of a hernia is usually a lump, or swelling, that can be seen in the groin area. There may be pain, or a pressure sensation.

The reason people have weakened muscles that eventually evolve into a hernia is usually congenital—in other words, they were born that way. Sometimes even babies are born with a hernia. Hernias tend to run in families, and the likelihood of having a hernia increases with age. Muscles can be weakened by a pregnancy, a large drop in weight, and from previous surgeries. This weakness makes them vulnerable to the development of a hernia.

While a person may have a hernia for years and never have a problem, there are serious complications that can occur if the hernia is not repaired. A **strangulated hernia** occurs when tissue and blood vessels slide out through the hernia and become trapped there. This cuts off blood flow and oxygen to these tissues, and can become a serious to fatal condition if it is not corrected rather quickly. The other major possibility is a bowel obstruction. This is where the bowel becomes trapped and its contents can no longer flow through the intestine. Symptoms would start with cramps, then progress to vomiting and a lack of bowel movements. Surgery is needed quickly to correct this condition before gangrene and sepsis sets in. Once you have a hernia, exercise cannot be used to strengthen the weakened area, and will actually cause the hernia to become larger from the strain placed on those muscles!

Back in the day, people routinely wore a truss or belt to support the weakened muscle and prevent anything from slipping through. Nowadays, with the improvements in the safety and technique of hernia surgery, this device would be used only when a patient wasn't a candidate for surgery. It is generally recommended that hernias be corrected before any serious complications can arise. A simple out-patient surgery will repair the weakened

muscle. Often a mesh, or synthetic “patch,” will be placed over the repaired area to give it extra strength and reduce the likelihood of a hernia reoccurring.

Some doctors have begun to use a laparoscopic technique to repair hernias. In this way, only a few small incisions are needed, and repairs are made using a small, hose-like scope. The two main advantages are a reduced risk of another hernia occurring and less pain after the operation.

Any lump or swelling must be evaluated by a physician. Not all lumps are hernias—a lump could be a growth or an enlarged lymph node. So if you notice any lump, get a medical evaluation as soon as possible.

More information:

[www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov) (search hernia)

[www.emedicinehealth.com](http://www.emedicinehealth.com) (search hernia)