

Inguinal (Groin) Hernias

What is an inguinal (groin) hernia?

A hernia occurs when part of the body bulges into an area where it normally shouldn't be. An inguinal hernia occurs in the groin. With an inguinal hernia, a small part of the intestine bulges through a weak spot in the lower wall of the stomach.

What are the symptoms?

There may not be any. When symptoms occur, they usually include a tugging or pulling feeling, or a bulge or lump in the groin area. It may be worse with coughing, sneezing, or straining.

Part of the intestine may get caught or trapped within the hernia. This is called a trapped hernia. It can cause pain, tenderness, redness, nausea, and vomiting. It is a serious problem that needs surgery right away.

When should I see a doctor?

You should see a doctor if you feel a bulge or pain in the groin area, or if the pain and tenderness are getting worse.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will do an exam and ask you to cough or strain down while he or she is pressing on the groin area. Sometimes, special tests are needed, such as a CT scan.

How is an inguinal hernia treated?

Small hernias with few symptoms may not need to be treated. Surgery usually is needed for larger hernias or if the hernia becomes trapped or causes troublesome pain. Surgery can be done using a scope with a light (laparoscope), or, more often, through a small incision in the skin. Results are similar with either type of surgery.

How long will it take to get better after surgery?

Recovery varies with the patient and the procedure. With some limits on activity to allow for healing, most people fully recover within four to six weeks.

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This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians. Other health-related information is available from the AAFP online at <http://familydoctor.org>.

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