At home after a hernia repair

What can I do and not do?

After your operation your abdominal muscles will partially "go on strike", making it difficult to sit up, especially on the day of surgery. However, most people recover quickly.

You may notice your tummy sticks out more than usual, making it difficult to do up trousers, belts and so on. It will take around two weeks to recover fully.

If you have had keyhole surgery for an inguinal hernia, there is nothing specific you should avoid doing once you go home. You can drive once you feel you can safely press the pedals in an emergency. However, if you have had a larger hernia repair, don't drive or do any heavy work until your surgeon has said it's OK.

For keyhole inguinal hernia repair, if you have a desk job you may need around one week off work, if you do physical work you will need around two weeks. If your job involves heavy lifting, it is best that you avoid this until your wound has healed enough (generally around two weeks). Avoid anything that causes strain or pain around the site of your repair.

For open surgery or larger repairs, you will need around four weeks off work, and should have a check-up with your surgeon before you return to work.

Discomfort and pain

It is common to have some pain in your groin or wounds for around a week after the operation, though this is not usually severe. Sometimes men can get pain in their testicle on the side of the repair, starting a few days after the operation, and usually settling within 48 hours.

Pain relief

Usually it's enough to take paracetamol (such as Panadol or Paracare) when you need it. If paracetamol is not enough for you and it is safe for you, you can add an anti-inflammatory such as ibuprofen (Nurofen), diclofenac (Voltaren) or naproxen. If you cannot take anti-inflammatories check with your doctor or pharmacist what the best alternative would be.

Bruising and swelling

You can expect bruising, and your wound is likely to feel hard for six to eight weeks after your surgery. Bruising tends to track down from your wound, and if you are a man into your testicles and penis. This can be quite dramatic, but looks worse than it feels. Don't be alarmed – it will fade within
one or two weeks.

You may also get some swelling, but this does not mean the hernia is still there. Your body will slowly absorb this fluid. See your GP if you have a fluid-filled lump (called a seroma) that is bigger than a walnut. Sometimes these heal more quickly if your GP takes the fluid off (this is called aspirating).

Wound care

After the operation there is thin tape covering your wounds. After a shower, pat the dressings dry with a towel. You can take the tape off seven days after your operation. It's rare for these wounds to get infected, but if your wound is weeping, getting more sore or red, or if you are unwell, then see your GP as soon as possible.

You probably won’t have stitches, but if you do your surgeon or nurse will let you know about when and how they will be removed.

Follow up

For an inguinal hernia repair you may not have a follow-up appointment with a surgeon, but you can see your GP if you have any problems after your surgery. Your GP can refer you back to the surgeon if necessary.

For larger hernia repairs you will need a check-up with your surgeon before you go back to work, drive, or do any heavy lifting.

Important!

Contact your GP, or an after-hours GP if:

- you develop a fever
- you have pain or swelling in your abdomen that gets worse
- you continue to vomit or feel sick
- your wound becomes red, hot or sore, or oozes fluid or pus.