After hernia repair surgery

Ki te kāinga i muri i te whakatika whaturama

Important

Contact your general practice team, or an after-hours service 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.

After your operation, you may notice your tummy sticks out more than usual, making it difficult to do up trousers, belts and so on. Your abdominal muscles will partially "go on strike", making it difficult to sit up, especially on the day of surgery. But most people recover quickly.

If you've had keyhole surgery for an inguinal hernia, there's 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.

If you've had a larger hernia repair, don't drive or do any heavy work until your surgeon has said it's OK.

Time off work

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'll need around two weeks.

If your job involves heavy lifting, it's best that you avoid this until your wound has healed enough (generally around four weeks). Avoid anything that causes strain or pain around the site of your repair.

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

It's 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 going away within 48 hours.

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

Bruising and swelling

You can expect bruising and your wound is likely to feel firm for six to eight weeks after your surgery.

Bruising tends to track down from your wound and if you're 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 doesn't mean the hernia is still there. Your body will slowly absorb this fluid. See your general practice team if you have a fluid-filled lump (called a seroma) that's bigger than a walnut. Sometimes these heal more quickly if your general practice team removed the fluid (this is called aspirating). Sometimes, this can risk causing infection.

Wound care

After the operation there's 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're unwell, see your general practice team as soon as possible.

You probably won't have visible stitches but if you do, your surgeon or nurse will let you know about when and how they'll 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 general practice team if you have any problems after your surgery. Your general practice team can refer you back to the surgeon if necessary.

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

Written by general and endoscopic surgeon, Canterbury DHB. Adapted by HealthInfo clinical advisers. Last reviewed August 2022.