

Inguinal (Groin) Hernia. What are they? They are weak areas in the abdominal wall that allow your child's intestines, or other organs, to bulge out into the groin.

Where are they? Inguinal hernias are found just below pant-line on the right and left. They are very close to your child's private area and may cause bulging of the scrotum in a boy, or the labia in a girl.

Who gets them? Both boys and girls can get hernias, but it is more common in boys. It is also more common in babies who are born prematurely.

What causes them? There is a natural tunnel in the abdominal wall that is present when a baby is developing. In boys the testicles are located inside of the abdomen and they pass through this tunnel and into the scrotum before birth. The tunnel is supposed to close automatically after that, but sometimes it does not close properly.

Why do they have to be fixed? When this tunnel remains open, other organs can get stuck inside it and squeezed. Most of the time it is a piece of the intestine. Sometimes, in girls, one of the ovaries can get stuck in the tunnel. Once an organ gets stuck it can be squeezed so tightly that the blood supply is cut off. If this happens to a piece of intestine your child can get very sick and may lose part of the intestines. We fix all inguinal hernias to prevent these complications.

How are they fixed? Your child will go to the operating room and be put to sleep. A 1-inch incision is made over the area of the hernia, and the "tunnel" through the wall of the stomach is explored. We empty all of the important organs, blood vessels, and nerves from inside of the tunnel and then we use stitches to close the tunnel so that nothing else can get through. If your child was born prematurely we will usually look at both sides and fix both hernias during the operation. This is sometimes done by putting a laparoscope (camera) into the abdomen and looking at the tunnel from the inside. Most children go home the same day and do not stay in the hospital.

Who has to stay in the hospital? If your child was born prematurely and is still very young he or she might have to stay overnight in the hospital. Very young babies have immature lungs and sometimes take longer to recover after being put to sleep for surgery. They usually stay in the hospital overnight and go home the next day.

Will my child be in pain? Usually not. They are under general anesthesia during the operation and will feel nothing. All babies will get some pain medicine injected into the surgical incision, or into the nerves near the incision, while they are in the operating room to eliminate pain. This medicine lasts for several hours. Then children may only need Tylenol or Motrin to control pain. But they may not need any more pain medicine at all.

What about complications? Occasionally there is bleeding or infection at the incision, or recurrence of the hernia. There is also a 1% chance of injury to the spermatic cord.

To make an appointment to discuss this topic, please call or email at the information listed below.

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