

Umbilical Hernia. What are they? It is a defect in the abdominal wall directly behind the belly button. This hole lets the intestines push through the abdominal wall and makes a soft bulge at the belly button. It may be very small and look just like an “outie” belly button, or it may be very large and look like an elephant’s trunk.

What causes them? When a baby is developing inside the mother, there is a time when the intestines are actually outside of the body. The intestines then come back inside the body through the belly button—kind of like a front door into your abdomen. Then the door is supposed to close. But in some children the door does not close all the way and there is a small hole left in the abdominal wall that becomes the hernia.

Is it dangerous? No. In fact, given time, most umbilical hernias go away by themselves. The door is actually closing properly, it is just occurring very slowly. If you notice that the hernia is getting smaller over time, it might go away completely by the time your child is 3-4 years old.

So why do we fix them? Sometimes the door does not close by itself. So if your child is nearing kindergarten-age and still has an umbilical hernia, it will need to be fixed with surgery. Surgery is performed in younger children if the hernia seems to be getting bigger instead of smaller, or if the stuff squishing out the hole seems to get stuck. We also fix very large umbilical hernias to make them look better.

How do we fix them? In the operating room. A small incision is made around the edge of the belly button and the hole in the stomach wall is located underneath it. The hole is sewn shut with large stitches and then the belly button is placed back over the top of the hole. Your child will have one Band-Aid covering his belly button after surgery, and all of the stitches will be underneath the skin. The stitches will dissolve by themselves over time.

What should I expect? Most of these surgeries take place as an outpatient. Your child will not be allowed to eat or drink anything for about 6 hours before the surgery. When you show up to the hospital your child will be checked in to a room and evaluated by the anesthesiologist. They will get some medicine to help them relax before going to the OR. They breathe a special gas to put them to sleep and then they get an IV after they are asleep. After the surgery they will come back to their room acting very sleepy and with the IV in place. You get to go home when they are awake and able to drink.

Complications? Bleeding or infection of the incision. Sometimes hernias come back.

Will my child be in pain? Usually no. During surgery some medicine will be injected into the belly button to numb the pain. Tylenol usually helps after that.

Then what? Your child’s wound will heal in a week or two and you will see your surgeon for a follow up appointment.

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

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