



Patient Care > Umbilical Hernia

Definition:

An umbilical hernia is a defect in the fascia (tough, scar like tissue) of the abdominal wall at the site of the belly button. Umbilical hernias result from the incomplete closure of the fascia where the umbilical vessels enter the abdomen. During embryologic life, the abdominal organs develop outside the abdominal cavity. By ten weeks gestation, they move into the newly formed abdominal cavity. The umbilical cord, which connects the organs and the blood supply to the placenta, enters into the cavity at the umbilicus. Normal events before birth cause gradual closure of the opening. Closure is normally completed after the umbilical cord is clamped or cut. If closure does not happen, tissue, fluid and sometimes bowel can protrude into the opening.

The defect or opening in the abdominal wall can vary in size from 0.5 cm to 3-4 cm in diameter. Abdominal contents can protrude into the area and bulge out under the skin, especially if the child is crying or straining. Incarceration is defined as bowel or omentum (fatty layer) getting stuck in the opening of the hernia and is very rare in this type of hernia.

Indications for Surgery:

Although the need for surgery must be determined on an individual basis, the most common reasons surgery is performed are:

1. Anyone who appears to have a **bowel obstruction** due to small bowel entering the hernia.
2. Surgery is indicated **if the protrusion and defect are 1.5cm or larger when the child is 4 years or older**
3. In a female child over age 4, repair is necessary to avoid recurrence later in life when pregnancy or other with problems may occur causing stretching of the abdominal wall
4. Most schools will not accept the responsibility of allowing a child with a hernia to participate in athletic activities.

Surgery and Home Care:

Repair of an umbilical hernia is done under general anesthesia usually as a day surgery. A small incision is made directly below the belly button in the normal skin fold. The skin is folded back, the hernia sac is removed, and the opening in the fascia is sutured closed. The belly button remains intact and normal in appearance postoperatively. The sutures are buried and dissolve therefore, there are no stitches to be removed. A pressure dressing may be applied and should be

left in place for 2-3 days with out getting wet. The skin around the umbilicus may appear loose for a period of time after the repair. As the child grows and the skin regains some of its elasticity, it will smooth out.

Revised: Suzanne Yoder, MD 4/28/08

Disclaimer: Your child's condition is unique. The information contained on this web site is not intended to substitute for advice from a doctor or nurse. If you are unsure about any aspect of your patient's care, please contact us at 303-839-6001, or talk to your pediatrician.

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