

Having surgery for an abdominal hernia



You're going to have surgery for an abdominal hernia. This health sheet explains:

- What the surgery involves
- How to prepare
- How to take care of yourself after your operation

Why am I being given this sheet?

Normally, the abdominal muscles surround the intestines and other organs and keep them inside the body.

Sometimes these muscles have a defect. Some may be a little bit separated. This "hole" allows the organs inside to pass through. Then they can appear under the skin. They form a hump. This is called a hernia.

There are two types of abdominal hernias::

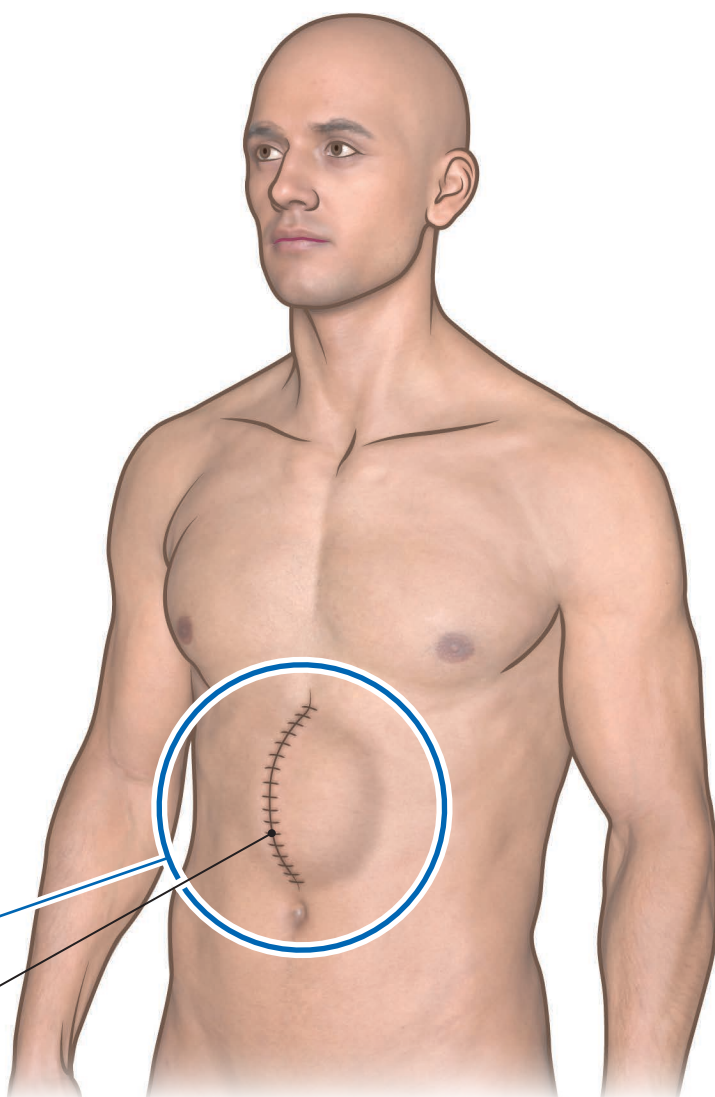
- **Ventral hernias.** These are often caused by a birth defect.
- **Hernias due to surgery (incisional hernias).** They appear where the muscles were cut in previous operations

How is a hernia treated?

Abdominal hernias are treated with surgery. This is done when they cause discomfort or pain, or when they interfere with physical activities, for example.

Hernia due to surgery

Scar from the old operation



Are all hernias operated on?

Depending on your health and other factors, it may be decided to simply follow the hernia. This is done, for example, if it doesn't bother you or cause any discomfort.

In general, even if the hernia isn't operated on, no other more serious problems will appear. But over time, hernias can get bigger. It depends on each patient.

Sometimes regular follow-ups are done to see how the hernia is progressing and if surgery is needed at a given time.

The doctor may have you wear a special belt called a hernia belt. This goes around the abdomen, with a wider part that presses on the hernia. It slows the progression of the hernia and provides support.



CAUTION

Sometimes you may suddenly feel severe pain at the site of the hernia. You may also have vomiting or nausea.

This can be a sign that the hernia is obstructed. That's to say, the organ that's sticking out through the hole is being pinched. This is called "incarceration" or "strangulation". If you have such symptoms, you should go to the emergency room immediately.

What does the operation involve?

The two muscles that are separated are brought together. Often, a prosthesis is also added to reinforce the repair and reduce the risk of a recurrence of the hernia.

The operation can be done by either:

- Making a single large incision at the site of the hernia.
- Making 3 or more small incisions in the abdomen. These are then used to insert instruments to operate from the inside.

You'll see with the doctor which approach is better for your case.

What are the risks associated with the surgery?

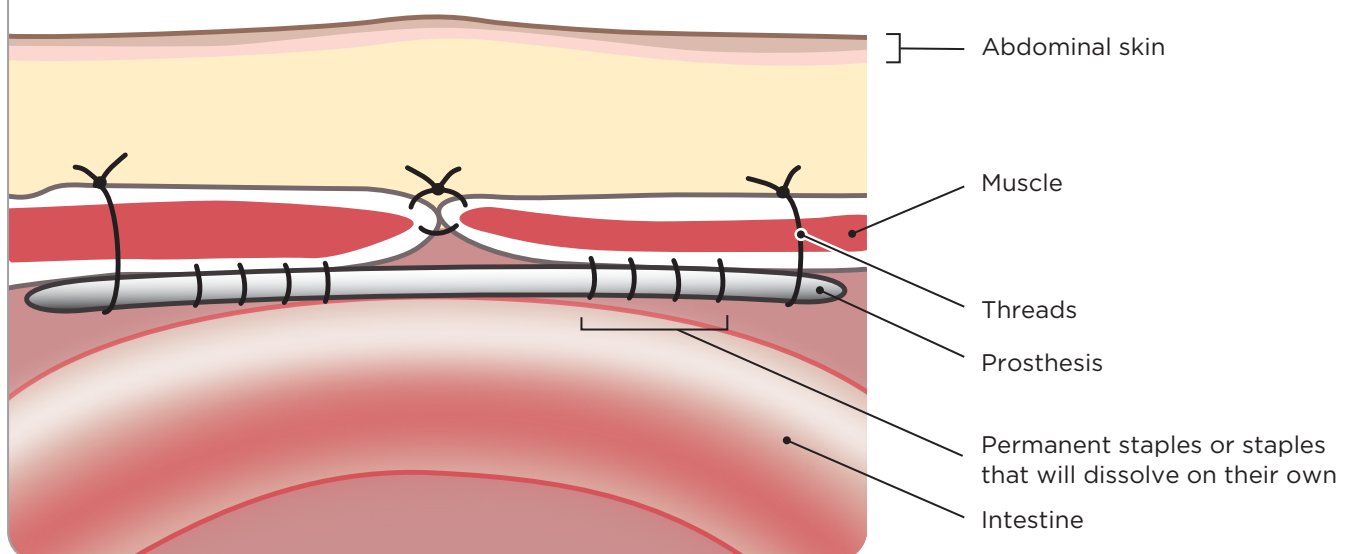
The main risks are:

- pain that persists over time (chronic)
- injury to the intestines
- infection of the wound
- accumulation of fluid at the hernia site (seroma)
- return of the hernia (recurrence)

The surgery can also cause temporary problems:

- difficulty urinating
- severe pain

HERNIA SURGERY IN THE ABDOMEN WITH A PROSTHESIS



How should I prepare for the operation?

The following tips will help you avoid complications and heal faster.

- **Quit smoking.**

Smoking increases the risk of infection and of health problems after the operation, especially to the lungs. With smoking, the wound heals less well. This is why:

- It's better to stop smoking and vaping 4 weeks before the operation or cut back as much as possible.
- It's important not to smoke in the 48 hours before the operation.



- **Stop drinking alcohol.**

- Stop 4 weeks before the operation. This reduces the risks of bleeding, having an infection, or having serious heart or lung problems.
- Don't drink alcohol **24 to 48 hours before the operation.** This can change the effect of the pain medications given during the operation.



- **Maintain a healthy weight.**

The hospital will contact you to give you the date of the surgery. You'll also receive other information and other health sheets to help you prepare.

How long should the operation take?

That depends on several factors. The doctor will tell you if it will be a day surgery (you're discharged the same day) or if you'll stay in the hospital for a few days.

What precautions should I take AFTER the operation?

To heal faster, allow time for the repair to become stronger, and prevent the hernia from returning, follow these tips:

- For 1-2 months, or until your follow-up appointment:
 - Wear a belt around your abdomen (abdominal binder).
 - Avoid lifting, pushing, or pulling objects over 5 kg (10 lbs). That's the weight of two 2.5 liter bottles of soft drink.
 - Don't exercise.
- Avoid being constipated. To do this:
 - Drink plenty of water unless your care team doesn't allow it.
 - Take a stool softener (laxative), such as Lax-A-Day or another brand.
- Walk as soon as you can. You can go up and down stairs. This will help you to heal faster and maintain your strength and muscle mass.



You can also see the health sheet [*Taking care of yourself after hernia surgery.*](#)

You'll be given pain medication when you leave the hospital.

Call the CHUM Appointment Centre, Monday to Friday, between 7:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

For any health concerns related to your hernia, you can call the CHUM Patient Health Line.



CHUM PATIENT HEALTH LINE

514 890-8086

24 hours a day, 7 days a week

You're a CHUM patient? You have questions about your health status? A nurse can help you.



Questions



Resource people and contacts



USEFUL RESOURCES

Other CHUM health fact sheets are available. Ask your care team which fact sheets can help you.



You can also read them online.
chumontreal.qc.ca/fiches-sante

The content of this document in no way replaces the advice of your healthcare professional.

To find out more about the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal
chumontreal.qc.ca