

Umbilical Hernia

This leaflet gives information for parents / carers whose child is having an umbilical hernia repair.

What is an umbilical hernia?

An umbilical hernia is caused by a weakness in the umbilical ring when your child's umbilical cord falls off as a baby. The abdominal contents push out through this weakness causing a hernia. As the stomach muscles develop the hernia tends to get better. You may notice your child's swelling is larger in the first year, particularly when they cry or strain. Most umbilical hernias do not cause any pain or discomfort and close on their own. More than 90-95% will resolve by the age of 4 years. The chance of the hernia closing on its own after the age of 4 years is small. The closure of the hernia is undertaken mainly for cosmetic reasons and so we rarely offer to do the surgery before the age of 4 years.

The Operation

The operation is performed under general anaesthetic and usually involves one incision within the umbilical area where the defect is stitched to repair it. Local anaesthetic is injected to the site during the operation for pain relief. The wound will then be closed with dissolvable sutures which can take up to 6-8 weeks to dissolve. A compression dressing is applied and is usually left on for a few days.

Risks and complications

Possible risks and complications for umbilical hernia repair include:

- General anaesthesia risks
- Infection
- Bleeding
- Developing a lump caused by the stitches or a collection of fluid (which normally settles over a few weeks)
- Injury to structures within the hernia / surrounding structures (rare)
- Recurrence
- Unnatural cosmetic results (Belly button may still protrude and excess skin may remain until child grows)

What to expect after surgery?

The area will be sore for a couple of days after surgery. You will be advised by the anaesthetist about what pain relief your child can take. It is advisable that this is taken regularly for at least 48 hours. Your child will probably be more comfortable in loose fitting clothing i.e. pyjamas or tracksuit.

The operation site should be kept clean and dry for the first 5 days. After 5 days your child may go into the bath, the dressing may be taken off at this time. If there is

any sign of infection in the form of redness, swelling or discharge of pus, contact your GP as your child may need some antibiotics.

If your child is feeling comfortable they can return to school after 1 week. Your child must not take part in any sport or bike riding until at least 3 weeks after the surgery. You are advised to contact your GP if the swelling and redness are causing concern after the first week.

Only certain cases are given a routine follow-up appointment in the surgical clinic.

Useful contacts for further information

If you have any queries prior to the procedure outlined and its implications to you or your relatives/carers, please contact the Consultant's secretary or Admissions clerk for children.

If you should need any help or advice for the first 48 hours following your child's surgery you are advised to contact the Children's assessment unit on 01603 289954. For advice after this time, please contact your own GP or NHS 111.

Further information may be found in the Parent section of the BAPS website.

British Association of Paediatric Surgeons
35-43 Lincolns Inn Fields
London
WC2A 3PE
Tel: 0207 9730308
Web address: www.baps.org.uk