

Inguinal hernia

Information for parents in the Neonatal Nursery

What is an inguinal hernia?

If there is a gap or weak spot in the muscles of your baby's abdomen, part of your baby's bowel or other tissues nearby may push through this opening. This makes a lump or bulge under the skin that is called a hernia. When this happens in the groin area, it is called an inguinal hernia. An inguinal hernia can occur on one or both sides of the groin. It is more common in boys and premature babies.

What causes an inguinal hernia?

During a baby's development, there is a natural opening between the abdominal cavity and the scrotum or groin. It is called the inguinal canal. In boys, the testicles develop in the abdomen and move down into the scrotum through the inguinal canal. The abdominal lining normally closes the canal shortly after birth. If the canal does not close completely, or the baby is born before it closes, some of the bowel or other tissues in the abdomen can enter the groin.

Can an inguinal hernia cause problems?

It is possible for the bowel to get trapped inside the hernia. If this happens the bowel could become blocked. If the blood flow to the area also becomes blocked, the bowel and testicle may be damaged.

Can a hernia be repaired?

Yes, surgery can repair an inguinal hernia and prevent the problems described above.

If surgery is recommended for your baby, the surgeon will talk with you about the operation, explain the risks and benefits, and answer your questions. You will be asked to sign a consent form, giving your permission for your baby to have the surgery.

The surgeon and your baby's doctors will decide the best time for your baby to have surgery. The surgeons aim to repair the hernia once most medical problems have been treated, but before your baby's goes home. However, if the bowel becomes trapped, surgery must be done right away.

What happens before surgery?

Your baby will have an intravenous (IV) put into a vein, so that he or she can be given fluids and medications. Your baby will not be fed for 3 to 4 hours before surgery so that his or her stomach will be empty.

What happens during surgery?

Most babies are given a general anesthetic so that they will be asleep during the surgery and not feel any pain. Some babies are given a spinal anesthetic, particularly if they have lung disease. The surgeon makes a small cut (incision) in the skin crease between the abdomen and leg. The contents of the hernia are put back into the abdomen and the opening or weak spot is closed and strengthened with stitches.

What happens after surgery?

After surgery, your baby will be given pain medication so that he or she will be more comfortable. Your baby will return to the nursery and be fed as soon as he or she is fully awake. The nurses will help you learn to care for your baby after surgery.

If you have any questions about your baby's inguinal hernia please ask your baby's nurse or doctor.