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## What is a Hernia?

A hernia is a weak spot between the muscles and connective tissue of the abdominal wall creating a gap where an organ or fatty tissue can push through and create a bulge that can cause pain or structural abnormality (1-2).

There are many types of hernias that are classified based on where they are located, some common types of hernias include (1-3):

<b>Ventral Hernia:</b> Occur in the front of the abdomen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Epigastric Hernia:</b> Found in the mid to upper portion of the abdomen (above the belly button)</li> <li>• <b>Umbilical Hernia:</b> Observed at (or near) the belly button commonly seen in infants and females post pregnancy.</li> <li>• <b>Incisional Hernia:</b> Located at the site of a previous surgical incision due to the weakened tissue.</li> </ul>
<b>Inguinal Hernia:</b> A very common type of hernia found in the groin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inguinal hernias are found commonly as swelling in the groin.</li> <li>• The bulge may appear on standing but reduce in size when lying down, they can be unnoticed at first but increase in size progressively over time.</li> </ul>
<b>Femoral Hernia:</b> Found just below the groin more commonly in women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Femoral hernias occur more commonly in women due to wider bone structure in the pelvis.</li> <li>• These types of hernias are rarer than inguinal hernias and have a greater risk of serious complications (i.e. strangulation) if left untreated.</li> </ul>

## Symptoms of Hernias

Symptoms of a hernia can vary depending on size and location, but many hernias commonly present with symptoms such as (1, 2, 4, 5):

**A visible bulge** especially when standing, coughing or straining

**Pain or discomfort** ranging from a dull ache to sharp pain and may be worsened during certain activities or when straining.

**A feeling of pressure or pulling** in the area surrounding the bulge

**A burning or aching sensation** at the site where the hernia is located



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## When to Seek Urgent Medical Attention

The majority of hernias are not immediately life threatening and some may not cause any symptoms at all. Certain symptoms may indicate a life-threatening condition which is known as a **strangulated hernia** which occurs when tissue is trapped in the gap between the abdominal wall and loses its blood supply (1-5).

Symptoms of strangulation include (1-5):

- Sudden and severe pain that gets worse very quickly.
- Severe nausea and vomiting.
- Fever.
- Redness or discolouration at the bulge (location of the hernia).
- The bulge appearing firm, tender and unable to be pushed back into the abdomen.

**If the above symptoms are experienced, present to your local emergency department.**

## Do I Need Treatment for a Hernia?

Although most hernias are not immediately life-threatening, they may worsen over time causing significant discomfort, mobility issues and lead to a poorer quality of life. Choosing not to treat a hernia may put a person at risk of strangulation or lead to significant progression in size, causing abnormalities to the abdominal wall requiring more complex and specialised treatment (1-7).

Hernias will not get better on their own and in most cases require surgery to correct the defect in the abdominal wall creating the bulge (1, 2, 4, 5).

If you are concerned about a possible hernia speak to your GP.

## Hernia Surgery

There are three main types of hernia surgery performed by appropriately trained surgeons (4, 6, 7):



## Minimally Invasive Surgery for Hernia Repair

Robotic surgery is changing the way hernia surgery is performed allowing for greater visualisation, precision and dexterity throughout the operation (4, 7).

Robotic surgery may provide benefits such as (4, 7):

- Smaller surgical incisions
- Less post-operative pain
- A faster return to daily activities of living

Your surgeon will be able to advise on the most appropriate surgical procedure for your condition and will relay any possible risks or complications of surgery.

Some possible complications of surgery may include but are not limited to (4, 6, 7):

- Surgical site infection
- Bleeding
- Post operative pain
- Nerve damage resulting in numbness and tingling
- Damage to surrounding organs
- Adverse reactions to anaesthesia
- Mesh related complications resulting in chronic pain, infection or damage to surrounding tissues.
- Recurrence of hernia

## Recurrence of Hernia

One possible complication of surgery is a recurrence of the hernia post-surgery. Although recurrence is relatively rare given the number of hernia surgeries performed each year in Australia, a greater focus is needed to reduce the rate of recurrence through improvements in surgical techniques and technology used to treat hernias (8).

Hernia surgeries are common, however greater focus is being placed on performing these initial surgeries to the highest standards to ensure that better patient outcomes are achieved (8).