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## Children's Services

# Inguinal Hernia

### What is an inguinal hernia?

An inguinal hernia is a tube (also called a 'pouch' or 'sac') that passes through a natural hole in the muscles of the groin. This tube is made up of the lining of the inside of the abdomen and is present in all babies before birth. The tube should have closed as part of development before birth but sometimes it does not. There is no way of preventing an inguinal hernia; it is not due to anything a mother did in pregnancy.

When intestine gets into the tube it can be seen as a swelling/bulge in the groin area. When no intestine is in the tube things appear normal but the hernia is still present.

Your child may have only one inguinal hernia, other children (approximately 1 in 20 boys but rare in girls) have an inguinal hernia on both sides.

### How is an inguinal hernia treated?

Your child will need to have an operation as there is a risk that a piece of bowel can become trapped in the inguinal hernia (this is called a 'strangulated hernia'). This would cause he/she to become unwell with pain and can cause damage to the bowel (and to the testis in a boy) if not treated promptly.

### How will I know if my child's hernia has strangulated and what should I do?

If your child's inguinal hernia has strangulated he/she will be inconsolable with a hard sometimes red, swelling. If they develop signs of strangulation of the hernia you should take your child to your nearest Emergency department (A&E) urgently.

There is nothing that you can do to prevent your child's hernia from strangulating. The only way to prevent this is to carry out the operation to fix the hernia. Inguinal hernias in very young babies are at greater risk of strangulation than in the older baby or child. The urgency of your child's operation will depend on their age.

## The operation

The operation to correct the inguinal hernia is called an 'inguinal herniotomy' and is carried out under general anaesthetic. The surgeon will make a small cut in the groin area, locate and disconnect the tube. The wound is stitched on the inside of the skin so you will not be able to see any of the stitches. All stitches are dissolvable. Sometimes paper tapes (called 'steristrips') are also applied.

Local anaesthetic will be used at the end of the operation so that when your child wakes up he/she will usually experience little discomfort.

If your child has an inguinal hernia on both sides, both can be operated on at the same time (called a 'bilateral inguinal herniotomy'). If he/she has an inguinal hernia on only one side (a 'unilateral herniotomy'), the surgeon will also examine the opposite side (by feeling it) under the anaesthetic and operate on both sides if he/she is sure that a bilateral hernia is present.

## After the operation

- Once your child is fully awake he/she will be able to have a drink and then something to eat.
- Painkillers (called 'analgesia') will be given as needed (usually Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen).
- Most children who have had an inguinal herniotomy will be able to go home on the same day as their operation.
- However, small babies and some children who had strangulated hernias need to stay overnight. If your child does need to stay in hospital overnight we will provide a bed for a parent to also stay if you wish to do so.

After the operation you may not see an immediate change in appearance because of the swelling that is evident. The swelling may take a few weeks to completely resolve.

## What are the complications of an inguinal herniotomy?

Complications from this operation are rare. Rare complications include:

- Infection
- Recurrence of the inguinal hernia
- Damage to the testis (in boys)

Sometimes, although the surgeon could only detect a unilateral inguinal hernia (ie: only on one side), a hernia later becomes evident on the opposite side. The child will then need to undergo a herniotomy operation on that side too.

## Discharge advice

- Your child's wound should be kept clean and dry; they should not be bathed for five days after the operation (wiping over the area with warm water is fine).
- We advise that your child wears loose fitting clothes for a few days after his/her operation. Denim trousers for example can rub on the wound and make it sore.
- Babies, infants and toddlers do not need to have their activities reduced. However, older children may find some physical activities (such as PE at school, bicycle riding and swimming) uncomfortable. They should therefore refrain from these for one to two weeks.
- Paracetamol ('Calpol') and/or Ibuprofen ('Brufen' or 'Junifen') should be given to prevent pain. Do follow the instructions on the bottle.
- Occasionally a wound can become infected. If your child's wound becomes red or there is increased tenderness, contact your GP.

## Follow up

You will receive an outpatient appointment for your child to be reviewed approximately three months from discharge.

For further information/queries please contact:

The ward you were on.....

Your nurse specialist.....



Addenbrooke's is smoke-free. You cannot smoke on site. For advice on quitting, contact your GP or the NHS smoking helpline free, 0800 169 0 169

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format: 01223 216032 or [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

Informacje te można otrzymać w innych językach, w wersji dużym drukiem lub audio. Zamówienia prosimy składać pod numerem: 01223 216032 lub wysyłając e-mail: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Polish

Se precisar desta informação num outro idioma, em impressão de letras grandes ou formato áudio por favor telefone para o 01223 216032 ou envie uma mensagem para: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Portuguese

Если вам требуется эта информация на другом языке, крупным шрифтом или в аудиоформате, пожалуйста, обращайтесь по телефону 01223 216032 или на вебсайт [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Russian

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## Cantonese

Bu bilgiyi diger dillerde veya büyük baskılı ya da sesli formatta isterseniz lütfen su numaradan kontak kurun: 01223 216032 veya asagidaki adrese e-posta gönderin: [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk)

## Turkish

এই তথ্য বাংলায়, বড় অক্ষরে বা অডিও টেপে পেতে চাইলে দয়া করে 01223 216032 নম্বরে ফোন করুন বা [patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk) ঠিকানায় ই-মেইল করুন।

## Bengali

### Document history

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Contact number	01223 245151
Published	December 2008
Review date	December 2010
Supersedes?	Version 1, November 2006
File name	Inguinal_hernia.doc
Version number	2
Ref	PIN 165