Children's Services

Umbilical hernia

What is an Umbilical hernia?

During pregnancy, the umbilical cord passes through an opening in the abdominal wall. This opening should close soon after birth, but in some cases the muscle does not close completely allowing bowel of intestine through. An umbilical hernia occurs when bowel or intestine pushes through a weakness in the muscles of the abdominal wall resulting in a swelling in the belly button area. There is no way of preventing an umbilical hernia; it is not due to anything a mother did in pregnancy.

Umbilical hernias usually close on their own without any intervention or treatment; many of them disappear spontaneously within the first year of life and most of them close by the age of four years. If it has not closed on it's own by the time the child is aged around four years then an operation might be undertaken.

Why treat an umbilical hernia?

It is not essential to treat an umbilical hernia. The main reason for surgically repairing the hernia after the age of four years is because the child is unhappy with the appearance of his/her belly button. It is therefore important that your child understands that everyone's belly button is individual so everyone's looks a bit different.

The operation

The operation to correct the umbilical hernia is carried out under general anaesthetic. The surgeon will make a small cut in the belly button (umbilicus) and close the muscle defect. 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. Sometimes a dressing will be applied over the steri-strips.

Local anaesthetic will be used at the end of the operation to minimise discomfort when your child wakes up.

After the operation

- Once fully awake your child will be able to have a drink and something to eat.
- Painkillers will be given as needed, usually Paracetamol and/or Ibuprofen.
- Most children who have had an umbilical hernia repair can go home on the same day as the operation.

- If your child needs to stay in hospital overnight we will provide a bed for a parent/carer to also stay if required.

After the operation there may be some swelling that is evident. The swelling may take a few weeks to completely disappear.

What are the complications of an umbilical herniotomy?

Complications from this operation are uncommon. Rare complications include:

- Infection
- Recurrence of the umbilical hernia
- Bleeding

Discharge advice

- Your child's wound should be kept clean and dry; avoid baths 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 the operation. Denim trousers for example can rub on the wound and make it sore.
- Children may find some physical activities uncomfortable such as PE at school, bicycle riding and swimming. They should therefore avoid these for one to two weeks.
- Paracetamol ('Calpol') and/or Ibuprofen ('Brufen' or 'Junifen') should be given to prevent pain. Please follow the instructions on the bottle.
- Steri-strips can be removed by gently peeling them off whilst your child is in the bath five days after the operation. If the steri-strips fall off before this time it is not necessary for them to be replaced.
- If your child has a dressing after their operation, gently remove it after 48. If the dressing falls off before this time it does not need to be replaced.
- Occasionally a wound can become infected. If your child's wound becomes red or there is increased tenderness, contact your GP.

Follow up

Your child will need to be reviewed between three and six months after the surgery. This is to check the healing of the wound and to ensure there has been no recurrence. Review is usually held in the children's outpatient clinic at Addenbrookes but review may be possible either at one of our outlying clinics or via your GP. You will be informed at the time of discharge where and when your child's review is to be held.

For further information/queries please contact:

The ward you were on……..

Your nurse specialist……..

We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:

If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

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