

FACTSHEET

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Umbilical hernia

What is an umbilical hernia?

An Umbilical hernia is an abnormal bulge that can be seen or felt at the umbilicus (belly button). These hernias are common in babies; low birth weight & premature infants are more likely to have an umbilical hernia. They are due to delayed closure of a small opening in the abdominal wall at the umbilicus. Umbilical hernias rarely cause serious problems in childhood and may be left alone to close naturally.

Strapping the hernia does not help it to close more quickly (and it may be dangerous).

Will my child need an operation?

Many umbilical hernias close naturally between 2-5 years of age. If it hasn't closed by this time then surgical treatment (operations) is usually advised.

In younger children, if the size of the opening in the abdominal wall is very large, then an operation is recommended. The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic. Your child comes to hospital on the day of the operation and is usually home the same day.

Where will the scar be?

A small incision is made at the base of the belly button. The scar, formed from this small incision while it never completely disappears, is usually quite difficult to see. Any scar that is visible will fade after six to twelve months.

The stitches are under the skin and they dissolve by themselves.

After the operation

- Your child can play normally.
- Many children will be playing and running the next day. This will not affect the healing of the wound.
- The dressing should be removed after three to ten days - your doctor will advise you about this and on showering and bathing.
- Your child will need to come back to the doctor for a check-up.

Is there pain after the operation?

Your child may have pain.

Ask your doctor for advice on medication and dosage.

Pain is not the only cause of distress after an operation. Fear, anxiety and hunger can all contribute. Try to stay calm and comfort your child. Most children also feel calmer and more comfortable when they get home.

If your child develops painful swelling or fever, contact your surgeon or local doctor immediately.

Remember:

- Most umbilical hernias go away by two- five years of age and do not need an operation.
- The operation can be safely performed in one day.
- After the operation, your child can play normally
- **If your child develops painful swelling or fever, contact your surgeon or local doctor immediately**