

Open Incisional Hernia Repair

GS04 Lite - Expires end of January 2026



This fact sheet is for general information about this procedure only. It is not intended to be used as medical advice or to replace advice that your relevant healthcare professional would give you. If you have a particular medical problem, please consult a healthcare professional.

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What is an incisional hernia?

An incisional hernia is a weakness in your abdominal wall which happens at the site of a cut (incision) made during a previous operation.

Any operation on your abdomen needs a cut that is closed with stitches. Sometimes your wound does not heal properly and a weakness happens in the muscle layer. This results in the contents of your abdomen, along with the inner layer, pushing through your abdominal muscles. This produces a lump under your skin called a hernia.

What are the benefits of surgery?

You should no longer have the hernia. Surgery should prevent serious complications and allow you to return to normal activities.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

You can sometimes control the hernia with supportive clothing or simply leave it alone. It will not get better without surgery.

What will happen if I decide not to have the operation or the operation is delayed?

Occasionally, the hernia can get larger with time. It can also be dangerous because your intestines or other structures within your abdomen can get trapped and have their blood supply cut off (strangulated hernia). The symptoms that may suggest a strangulated hernia are:

- severe pain;
- a hernia that will not disappear when you lie down;
- vomiting.

If you have any of these symptoms you must call your healthcare team immediately as you may need an urgent operation.

If you are female and are planning to become pregnant, it is usually better to wait until after your pregnancy before having the operation. Pregnancy increases the size of your abdomen and may undo the hernia repair. Your surgeon

will tell you the risks of delaying having the operation.

What does the operation involve?

Various anaesthetic techniques are possible.

The operation can take between 90 minutes and 3 hours, sometimes longer in more complicated cases. Your surgeon will make a cut through your old scar. They will repair the weak tissue either with stitches only or using a synthetic mesh, which they will stitch to the muscles under your skin.

Your surgeon will close your skin over the repair. They may need to form a flap of skin over the repair so that your skin closes properly.

How can I prepare myself for the operation?

If you smoke, stopping smoking now may reduce your risk of developing complications and will improve your long-term health.

Try to maintain a healthy weight. You have a higher risk of developing complications if you are overweight.

Regular exercise should help to prepare you for the operation, help you to recover and improve your long-term health. Do not do exercises that involve heavy lifting or make your hernia painful.

Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Speak to the healthcare team about any vaccinations you might need to reduce your risk of serious illness while you recover. When you come into hospital, practise hand washing and wear a face covering when asked.

What complications can happen?

Some complications can be serious and can even cause death.

General complications of any operation

- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- Bleeding
- Blood clot in your leg



An incisional hernia

- Blood clot in your lung
- Chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

- Developing a collection of blood (haematoma) or fluid (seroma) under your wound
- Difficulty passing urine
- Skin necrosis, where some of the skin flap dies
- Injury to your bowel
- Damage to nerves
- Removing your belly button

Consequences of this procedure

- Pain
- Unsightly scarring of your skin

How soon will I recover?

You may be able to go home the same day or your doctor may recommend that you stay in hospital for one or more days.

Increase how much you walk around over the first few days.

Your doctor will tell you when you can return to work.

Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask the healthcare team or your GP for advice.

Most people make a full recovery and can return to normal activities. However, the hernia can come back.

Summary

An incisional hernia is a weakness in your abdominal wall which happens when previous wounds do not heal properly. If left untreated, an incisional hernia can cause serious complications.

Keep this information document. Use it to help you if you need to talk to the healthcare team.

Some information, such as risk and complication statistics, is taken from global studies and/or databases. Please ask your surgeon or doctor for more information about the risks that are specific to you, and they may be able to tell you about any other suitable treatments options.

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Acknowledgements

Reviewer

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Illustrator

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