



### What is an inguinal hernia?

- An inguinal hernia occurs when there is a weakness or an opening in the lower abdominal muscle wall. Part of the abdominal contents (such as intestines) can push through this opening.
- Inguinal hernias are sometimes called groin hernias. The groin is the area where the abdomen meets the top part of the leg.
- In girls, the hernia appears as a lump extending from the groin into the upper labia (see Figure 1). This area is unique to girls.
- Inguinal hernias are common in infants and children.



Figure 1

### How does a child get an inguinal hernia?

- Inguinal hernias in children most often occur when the groin opening present in the fetus fails to close securely at birth. Abdominal contents can push through this opening. In girls, it is often the tube and ovary that fall into the hernia sac (see Figure 2).
- Inguinal hernias are more common in boys than girls. They may occur on either side, but they are more common on the right side.
- Some factors place children at higher risk for inguinal hernias, such as prematurity or family history of hernias.

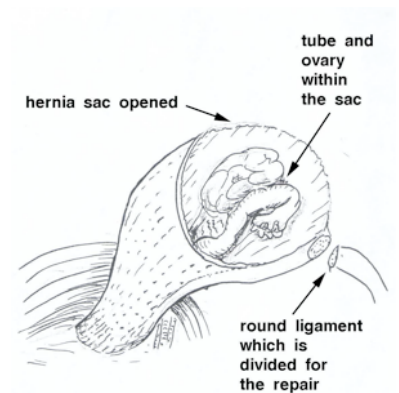


Figure 2

### How do you know if your child has an inguinal hernia?

- Inguinal hernias look like a lump or a bulge in the groin area. You may see the bulge when your child cries, coughs, stands or strains. Often the bulge disappears when your child lies down or relaxes.
- After a physical exam, your child's doctor will let you know if an inguinal hernia is present.
- Your child may see the bulge appear and disappear for weeks or months without causing discomfort. However, sometimes a loop of bowel or an ovary in girls becomes caught in the hernia sac. If it remains caught, the blood flow to it can be blocked. This is called an incarcerated hernia.
- If your child's hernia is incarcerated, have her lie down and try to relax.
- You may gently push on the hernia if it is caught. This may move (reduce) the contents back into the abdomen. If this doesn't work, and your child is in pain, call your child's pediatrician or surgeon right away. If the doctor is unable to reduce it, your child may need to have surgery right away to repair the strangulated hernia.

### How is an inguinal hernia treated?

- Surgery is needed to repair an inguinal hernia. It will not go away on its own and there is no medication or therapy that makes a hernia resolve. The hernia usually gets larger over time and may cause harm to the bowel or ovary if it becomes (incarcerated). It is much safer to treat an inguinal hernia before this happens rather than as an emergency.
- Repair of an inguinal hernia is one of the most common operations in children.

### What happens on the day of the surgery?

- General anesthesia is used. Most children go home on the day of the operation. However, some children need to spend a night in the hospital for observation.
- Your child will meet both the surgeon and the anesthesia doctor on the day of the surgery.
- After surgery, your child will stay in the Day Surgery Unit until she is ready to go home. Parents are welcome to stay with their child during this time.

## What happens after surgery?

- You will be given a written instruction sheet before going home that tells you how to care for your child.
- Most children have some discomfort after surgery. The doctor may prescribe pain medicine. Give pain medication as prescribed and instructed by your doctor or nurse practitioner. Please ask your child's doctor, nurse practitioner or pharmacist to explain any instructions that you do not understand.
- There are usually no stitches to remove. The stitches are under the skin and dissolve on their own.
- A clear, waterproof dressing or glue will cover the incision, which will be in the groin area.
- Your child may shower or have a sponge bath at home. No tub baths for 1 week after surgery.
- Your child should not use straddle toys or bicycles, play sports, or go to gym class for 3 weeks after surgery.
- Your child's doctor will ask you to make a follow-up appointment or phone call about 2 weeks after the surgery to check how the area is healing. At the follow-up visit, your doctor or nurse practitioner will tell you when it is safe to resume active play, gym class and sports.

## When to call your child's doctor or nurse practitioner

- Before the surgery, if you notice a firm bulge in the groin that does not go away, and your child is in pain, call your child's surgeon right away, day or night
- Increased redness, swelling, or tenderness around incision site
- Bleeding or drainage from incision site
- Fever greater than 101°F
- Pain unrelieved by prescribed medication

Call if you have any questions or concerns.

## Numbers to call

- Monday–Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. call the Nurse Practitioners' Line at 617-355-7716.
- After 6 p.m. on weekdays and on weekends and holidays, call the hospital page operator at 617-355-7800 and ask to speak with the surgeon on-call.

*This Family Education Sheet is available in [Arabic](#) and [Spanish](#).*