

Incisional hernia

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.

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic.

Open repair

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.

Laparoscopic repair

The operation can take several hours. Your surgeon will make several small cuts on your abdomen so they can insert tubes (ports) into your abdomen. Your abdominal cavity will be inflated with gas (carbon dioxide). Your surgeon will insert surgical instruments through the ports along with a telescope so they can see inside your abdomen and perform the operation.

Your surgeon will free up the structures from your abdomen that are stuck in the hernia, and insert a synthetic mesh to cover the weak spot.

What complications can happen?

General complications of any operation

- bleeding
- infection of the surgical site (wound)
- allergic reaction to the equipment, materials or medication
- blood clot in your leg
- blood clot in your lung
- chest infection

Specific complications of this operation

Keyhole surgery complications

- damage to structures such as your bowel, bladder or blood vessels
- recurrence of hernia
- surgical emphysema
- gas embolism

Hernia repair complications

- developing a collection of blood (haematoma) or fluid (seroma) under your wound
- difficulty passing urine
- injury to structures that come from your abdomen and are within the hernia

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. You may need to take painkillers to help you.

You may be advised to wear an abdominal binder for support in early post operative period.

Sometimes there can be a bulge noted in the postoperative period over the site of initial hernia, which mostly occurs due to body reaction to accumulate fluid in the previous hernial site, known as seroma. It usually is absorbed by the body and rarely intervention is required to remove it.

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.

Dr Naveen Agarwal

GENERAL AND LAPAROSCOPIC SURGEON

