

Information Leaflet for Parents/Carers

Umbilical Hernia



Introduction

An umbilical hernia is when some of the contents of the tummy (e.g. fat or the bowel) pokes out through a hole in the muscle just underneath the belly button. It is noticed as a lump in the belly button that may go away when lying down, or increase in size when standing, crying or straining.

How does an umbilical hernia occur?

During pregnancy, the umbilical cord passes through a hole in the baby's tummy wall. This hole should close soon after birth, but in some babies it remains open. This means that there is a gap for contents from the tummy to poke through.

An umbilical hernia cannot be prevented and is not due to anything a mother did in pregnancy.

Umbilical hernias usually close spontaneously without an operation: many disappear during the first year of a baby's life and most of them close by the time a child is four years old.

After four years of age, the hole does not tend to close on its own and it can be fixed with an operation.

What is an umbilical hernia repair?

An Umbilical Hernia Repair is an operation to find the hole in the muscle of your child's tummy and close it. The surgeon will make a small cut under the belly button, find the hole and close it with stitches. This operation is done under general anaesthesia.

The wound is closed with dissolvable stitches, which will disappear naturally as the wound heals.

What are the benefits of the operation?

It is often not essential to repair an umbilical hernia, as they generally they do not cause your child any problems. The operation is usually done for cosmetic reasons, though it also prevents the hernia from becoming any worse in the future

Are there any other possible treatment options?

There are no other treatment options for an umbilical hernia which did not heal itself naturally.

How will my child recover after the operation?

Please keep your child's wound clean and dry. Your child should not be bathed for five days after the operation, though gently wiping over the area with warm water is fine.

Your child should wear loose fitting clothes for a few days after their operation. Tight clothes can rub on the wound and make it sore.

Children may find some physical activities (such as PE at school, bicycle riding and swimming) uncomfortable and should therefore refrain from these for one to two weeks.

Paracetamol ('Calpol') and/or Ibuprofen ('Brufen') should be given to your child to prevent pain. Please follow the instructions on the bottle.

Are there any risks of the procedure?

Complications from this operation are rare. They include:

- Wound infection: if your child's wound becomes red, there is increased tenderness, or the wound starts to leak fluid, contact your GP or your surgeon for some antibiotics.
- Recurrence of the hernia (it can come back): this will require another operation.
- Injury to bowel: this is rare but can occasionally occur when the hole is being closed.
- Excess skin (a flat or "inny" belly button cannot be guaranteed): as the skin has been stretched from the hernia, it sometimes looks excessive when the hernia has been repaired. As your child grows and gets bigger, this should resolve. However many children will continue to have a belly button with skin that sticks out after the repair.

Follow up

Usually for an uncomplicated operation like this one, no clinic follow up is arranged. Occasionally, your surgeon may decide to see your child again in clinic. In this case, you will be informed at the time of discharge when your child's review is scheduled for. This is generally in the outpatient department of BCH. Your clinic appointment will be sent in the post.

Any urgent or general concerns related to the operation after you go home could be reported to your GP or, out of hours, to your surgeon. The surgical team can be contacted via the hospital switchboard on 0121 333 9999.

Looking after and sharing information about your child

We have a duty of care to help patients and families understand how information about them is kept and shared and we include the following information in all our patient leaflets:

Information is collected about patients relevant to their diagnosis, treatment and care. We store it in written records and electronically on computer. As a necessary part of that care and treatment we may have to share some patient information with other people and organisations who are either responsible or directly involved in the patient's care. This may involve taking the patient's information off site. We may also have to share some information for other purposes; such as research etc. Any information that is shared in this way will not identify the patient unless we have the patient's and parent's/carer's consent. If you have any questions and/or do not want us to share that information with others, please talk to the people looking after your child or contact PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on 0121 333 8403.

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