



PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUTS

Umbilical Hernia

What is an umbilical hernia?

A hernia is when there is an opening in the muscle wall and some of the intestines bulge through the muscle opening. In an umbilical hernia the navel area (belly button) is where the muscle opening is. The navel will bulge with crying or straining. The bulge may disappear when your baby is quiet. If you feel the area with your finger, you will feel a small round opening in the muscles of the abdominal wall. The hernia passes through this ring. Umbilical hernias are very common. Crying causes them to bulge, but does not make them any bigger or last any longer. They are not painful and they never break. The opening in the muscles usually closes on its own by school age. Half of the persistent hernias close by adolescence.

How is it treated?

No treatment is needed unless the hernia persists beyond the age of 5 or 6 years. At that age, outpatient surgery can be performed to close the muscle if your child is concerned about how it looks or if the opening is more than 2 centimeters (about 1 inch) across. Taping a hernia closed does not speed healing and can lead to a skin rash or infection. The only complication (which occurs in far less than 1% of cases) is getting a loop of intestine stuck in the opening. If you think this has happened (if, for instance, the hernia becomes hard and tender and won't go back in), call your physician immediately. Your physician will check the hernia on regular office visits

Adapted from: Instructions for Pediatric Patients by Barton D. Schmitt, M.D., Pediatrician

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