Information Leaflet for parents

Umbilical Hernia Repair

Produced April 2004
Umbilical Hernia Repair

We have written this leaflet for children with an umbilical hernia. This leaflet will help to explain what will happen when your child comes into hospital for an umbilical hernia repair.

What is an Umbilical hernia?

A hernia is a lump or swelling which happens when the bowel or intestine pushes through a weakness in the muscles of the abdominal wall. A hernia that happens in the belly button area is called an umbilical hernia. This is a small hole or defect in the muscles of the abdomen, where the umbilical cord was attached during pregnancy. This allows a piece of bowel to slip through this hole and form a swelling.

Why does it happen?

During pregnancy, there is a small opening in the abdominal muscles so that the umbilical cord can pass through, connecting the mother to the baby. This is called the umbilical ring. After birth, the umbilical cord is cut and the stump begins to shrink and fall off. The small hole or umbilical ring usually closes soon after birth. Sometimes however, the muscles that make up the ring do not grow together, which leaves a small opening present. Because the hole or umbilical ring has not closed a piece of intestine or bowel can slip through the hole causing a swelling at the belly button. This is an umbilical hernia.
Could I have done anything to stop my child from developing a hernia?

No. There is no way of preventing a hernia.

What are the facts about Umbilical hernias?

- Umbilical hernias are not painful.
- Umbilical hernias do not cause any symptoms and are not dangerous. Leaving it alone is therefore advised, as there are very few complications.
- Umbilical hernias usually appear soon after birth.
- Umbilical hernias have a high chance of closing on their own without treatment. 85% of them will disappear without any treatment by the time your child is age 1. Most of them close by the time your child is 4 years old. Sometimes the hernia may close even after the age of 4.
years old, though the chance of this happening decreases with each year of your child's life. This is why we do not repair them unless your child is about 4 years or older.

- Umbilical hernias are a common condition. They are found in 10% of infants and young children, with 90% of those being Afro-Caribbean. They are more common in girls than boys and in premature (early) or low birth weight babies.

- You may see the lump or it may look bigger when your child is laughing, crying, coughing or using the toilet. Do not worry; this is normal. It will not cause any pain if the swelling is bigger than normal.

- The size of an Umbilical hernia can change in shape and size, from looking like a small cherry to a large lime.

- In the past some Umbilical hernias were treated by strapping a belt-like cloth around the waist at the level of the belly button to push the hernia back in. We do not use this method anymore as it does not help and may possibly be harmful.

- When your child is relaxed, calm and lying down, the Umbilical hernia may get smaller or go away.
When your child’s GP (General Practitioner) pushes gently on the hernia or bulge it will usually go back into the abdomen. This means that the hernia is reducible and the bowel or intestine can move easily in and out, back to the normal body position. Fewer than 1% of children have an irreducible umbilical hernia, meaning the bowel becomes stuck or difficult to gently push back to the normal body position.

How will my child's Umbilical hernia be treated?

It is not essential for your child to have an operation to repair the Umbilical hernia. The main reason for closing it is if you feel your child would look better with no swelling in the belly button area.

If your child is 4 years or older and you decide that you want your child to have the Umbilical hernia repaired, then your child will need an operation called a herniotomy. This will close the small hole or defect and stop the bowel slipping through.

Your child’s operation will be done under general anaesthetic. (Your child will be put to sleep) The operation will take about 30 minutes. Your child will be away from the ward for about one and a half hours due to the anaesthetic and wakening up time in recovery. You are able to go with your child to the
anaesthetic room until they are asleep. Usually this kind of operation can be carried out in one day (day case surgery). We may need you to stay in hospital overnight if:

Your child has other medical problems.

Your child vomits regularly after the operation and does not keep any food or drink in their stomach. This is very uncommon, as we can give medicines to stop the sickness.

**Where will my child's operation take place?**

You will meet the doctors and nurses who will be looking after your child in the day surgery unit. The operation will take place in the operating theatres in the hospital.

**What does the operation involve?**

On the day of your child's operation the Anaesthetist will meet you to talk about your child's anaesthetic.

When your child is asleep the Anaesthetist will either place a local anaesthetic into the area of the operation, or they will carry out a caudal block. This is when a local anaesthetic will be given into the lower part of the back to numb the body from the hips down. This will be done to help stop your child from feeling any pain and discomfort during their operation.
The surgeon will repair the weakness in the muscles through a small incision (cut) in the belly button or umbilicus. He will then be able to push back the bowel or intestine back into their normal place.

The wound on the surface of the skin will be closed with dissolvable stitches or special glue. There will be no stitches showing on your child's body. The surgeon will stitch the wound from the inside. These stitches will not need to be taken out as they dissolve and will disappear on their own.

**What are the benefits of Umbilical hernia surgery?**

- The bulge or lump where the hernia was situated will no longer be there. In a couple of days your child will be back to his/her normal self.

- After your child's operation the piece of bowel will no longer be trapped in the hernia.

**What are the risks of Umbilical hernia surgery?**

- Complications with Umbilical hernia repairs in children are very uncommon.

- There is a small risk of infection and/or bleeding.
• There is a very small risk of the hernia returning.

• There is a small risk with any anaesthetic but complications are rare.

• Your child may develop a headache, feel sick, dizzy or complain of a sore throat after coming round from the anaesthetic. These symptoms should go away quickly.

• If your child had a caudal anaesthetic placed into the lower part of their back, they may complain of numbness in their legs for a few hours after their operation. If so, your child may not be able to get out of bed straight away. Do not worry. This should not last for very long.

What happens after the operation?

• Your child may have bruising and tenderness on the wound. Do not worry. This is quite normal and will settle with time.

• Your child may have a bandage or dressing over their umbilicus or belly button.

• Loose clothing will help to reduce any discomfort your child may have. Your child can still wear trousers or a skirt as usual.
• Medicines such as paracetomol and ibuprofen can be given within the first 24 hours after the operation to help reduce any pain.

• You will not need to see the doctor at the hospital again unless there are specific reasons.

• If you have any problems then please contact your GP or family doctor who will be happy to give you advice and support.

• Your child's nurse will explain about looking after your child at home.

• A discharge advice leaflet will be given to you when you leave the hospital, telling you about schooling, sports etc.

Is there any other treatment my child can have other than an operation?

It is not essential for your child to have an operation. Your child can lead a normal life with an umbilical hernia, as there are very few complications.

How will an Umbilical hernia repair affect my child's future?

In most children there are no long-term affects of having an Umbilical hernia repair. It is a very successful operation.
Data Protection Act 1998

We collect information about your child and family relevant to their diagnosis and treatment. We share it in written records and on computer. We may have to share some of your information with other people and organisations. 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 the PALS Officer (Patient Advice and Liaison Service) on 0121 333 8403.

Please use this space to write down any notes or questions you may have:
Further Information

We hope this leaflet will help you to understand the treatment offered to your child. If you feel you need more information or have any concerns, it is important that you talk to your Consultant's secretary.

Telephone........................................................................................................

They will pass your concerns onto your Consultant.

Information can also be found on the Internet. For more information you may find this website useful:

www.lpch.org/DiseaseHealthInfo/HealthLibrary/digest/hernia.html

Internet access is available in the Child and Family Information Centre. This is on the Ground Floor of the hospital near the main Reception Desk.

This leaflet has been produced by the Action On General Surgery Programme.

Reference:
The illustration in this leaflet is taken from the above website.