Learn about incisional hernias

For patients who have had surgery to the abdominal (belly) area

Read this pamphlet to learn:

• What is an incisional hernia
• How do I know if I have an incisional hernia
• What can cause an incisional hernia
• How is an incisional hernia treated
• How can I reduce my risk of getting an incisional hernia
• Where to find more information about incisional hernias

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca

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What is an incisional hernia?

When you have abdominal (belly) surgery, a cut (or incision) is made in your belly area. An incisional hernia is when part of your abdominal wall pushes through the place where the cut was made.

An incisional hernia causes discomfort or pain in some people. Incisional hernias are one of the most common problems after abdominal surgery.

How do I know if I have an incisional hernia?

If you have a lump or swelling around the area where the cut was made, you may have an incisional hernia. To check for a hernia:

1. Stand up. It is easier to notice an incisional hernia when you are standing.

2. Look and feel for changes around where the cut was made.

Call your doctor right away if you think you have an incisional hernia.

What can cause an incisional hernia?

You are more likely to get an incisional hernia if you:

- Have an infection
- Are obese (overweight)
- Smoke
- Have diabetes
• Cough
• Vomit (throw up)
• Do heavy physical exercise (for example lifting heavy objects)
• Strain while having a bowel movement (pooping)
• Have had your abdominal surgery less than 2 years ago

How is an incisional hernia treated?

Some incisional hernias do not need to be treated while others need surgery. This depends on the size of the hernia, where the hernia is and how much pain you have.

Your disease or illness, and treatment may also affect whether you can have surgery. Talk to your doctor about what treatment is right for you.

If you need surgery your doctor may do laparoscopic surgery. Laparoscopic surgery uses smaller cuts (incisions) than other types of surgery. The doctor puts tiny tools and a camera into the place where they made the cuts. The camera allows them to see the hernia and fix it.

How can I reduce my risk?

• Eat a healthy diet
• Quit or reduce smoking
• Do not lift heavy objects
• Do not do activities that strain your stomach muscles (for example lifting heavy objects.)
Where to find more information

For more information on incisional hernias visit the websites listed below:
