

# Learn About Incisional (Ventral) Hernias

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

Read this pamphlet to learn:

- What is an incisional (or ventral) 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



## **What is an incisional or ventral hernia?**

**Incisional hernia and ventral hernia is the same thing.** We will use incisional hernia in this pamphlet.

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.

You should seek medical attention 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:

- Had a wound infection after an abdominal surgery
- Are obese (overweight)
- Smoke
- Have diabetes
- Cough
- Do heavy physical exercise (for example lifting heavy objects)
- Strain while having a bowel movement (pooping)

## **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.

Some hernias require bigger surgeries to reconstruct the abdominal wall. Your surgeon will discuss the best options with you.

## How can I reduce my risk ?

- Eat a healthy diet
- Quit smoking
- Maintain a healthy weight. Lose weight if necessary
- 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:

- [Mount Sinai](#)
- [PatientCoUK](#)

The development of patient education resources is supported by the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation.

Visit [www.uhnpatienteducation.ca](http://www.uhnpatienteducation.ca) for more health information.

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Revised: 01/2020 by Dr. Todd Penner