

What to do if you get a hernia during pregnancy?



Pregnant women may have an increased risk of developing a hernia due to increased intraabdominal pressure¹. If you develop a hernia during pregnancy, you may have the option to have it repaired during or after pregnancy. You should talk to your doctor about whether the appropriate time for you to have a hernia repair surgery is before or after delivery and what repair options may exist for you.

Why is pregnancy a risk factor for hernias?

Hernias occur when a part of the intestine or other tissue pushes through an opening in the abdomen or groin. Pregnancy is associated with increased pressure in your belly as the baby grows. Pregnancy is also associated with stretching and thinning of the muscles in your belly. These two factors, increased abdominal pressure and weakened muscles, can both lead to a greater risk of a hernia.²

Other factors that increase the risk of a hernia during pregnancy³

¹ Lappen JR, Sheyn D, Hackney DN. Does pregnancy increase the risk of abdominal hernia recurrence after prepregnancy surgical repair? *Am J Obstet Gynecol.* 2016 Sep;215(3):390.e1-5. doi: 10.1016/j.ajog.2016.05.003. Epub 2016 May 10. PMID: 27177521.

² <https://americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/pregnancy-complications/hernia-during-pregnancy/>

³ What to Do if You Get a Hernia During Pregnancy, <https://www.everydayhealth.com/hernia/during-pregnancy/>

If you're pregnant and have certain underlying health conditions, the risk of developing a hernia increases. Some of these conditions include:

- Obesity
- Previous abdominal surgery
- Multiple pregnancies (twins, triplets, etc.)
- Chronic coughing conditions
- Chronic constipation
- Frequent lifting of heavy objects

Symptoms of a hernia during pregnancy²

Hernias in pregnant women do not always cause obvious symptoms. For those who do have symptoms, you may feel a lump when you lie down or push on the area. This area may occasionally become sore, particularly if you have been active.

If you are unable to push the hernia lump back into your body while lying down, then the hernia may be trapped or incarcerated. If you become nauseated, vomit, and / or the bulge starts to turn red, purple, or dark, then the hernia may be strangulated. In either of these scenarios, you should talk to a medical professional immediately.

Treatment of a hernia while pregnant

Timeline for treatment²

There is no clear “best time” to get your hernia repaired. The decision on when to get your repair depends on the size of the hernia, severity of any associated symptoms, and an honest discussion with your doctor.

Overall, there are three common times when you can get your repair:

1. During pregnancy: Repairs can be done while you are still pregnant. This is more common for symptomatic hernias or hernias that become strangulated. The timing of your procedure will vary based on when the hernia occurred and the preferences of your hernia surgeon, obstetrician, and anesthesiologist.
2. During a C-section: If you have a c-section, the hernia can sometimes be repaired at the same time.
3. After childbirth: For smaller hernias or hernias without any symptoms, most surgeons will recommend you keep an eye on the hernia until after childbirth. Generally, these

procedures will be delayed until at least 5-8 weeks after you give birth, but you can wait longer if the hernia is stable.

Types of repair options

Depending on the size and location of your hernia, your doctor may recommend a hernia repair with or without mesh. Hernia repairs without mesh are often only done if the hernia is small.

If your doctor recommends a mesh, there are some mesh options that are designed to stay in your body permanently to support the repair. Others are made of natural materials that will absorb over time, leaving only your own tissue. You should discuss these options with your doctor to see what option may be right for you.