

Guidelines for Hernias and Pregnancy: What You Need to Know



Pregnancy is an exciting and beautiful time in a woman's life. A time that brings tremendous change—not only in the welcoming of a new addition to the world, but changes and transformations to a woman's body (and its innerworkings) overall.¹

Why Is Pregnancy a Risk Factor for Hernias?

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—which may allow part of the intestine or other tissue to push through an opening in the abdomen or groin. These two factors, increase abdominal pressure and weakened muscles, can both lead to a greater risk of a hernia.^{2,3}

Common Types of Hernias During Pregnancy

- An [inguinal hernia](#) occurs when your intestines protrude through your lower abdominal wall or inguinal canal (the area that holds your uterus). As your baby grows and your belly expands, you may notice a lump where your thigh and groin come together. It may seem to go away when lying down, but you may be able to see when you cough, stand, or strain.⁴
- A [femoral hernia](#) protrudes into a different area of the groin called the femoral canal—which lies just below the inguinal canal. It's caused by the stretching of the femoral canal, which may occur due to weight gain around the hips and upper legs. It's possible you may notice a lump around the crease of the groin or into the upper thigh. As with an inguinal hernia, it may seem to go away when lying down, but you may be able to see it clearly when you cough, stand, or strain.⁵
- While [umbilical hernias](#) are most commonly found in infants, it is possible for adults to get them, too. A bulge or soft swelling near the navel/belly button is a common sign of an umbilical hernia, and like inguinal and femoral, may be more noticeable while coughing, laughing, or straining.⁶

Other Factors That Increase the Risk of a Hernia During Pregnancy⁷

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

Learn about [5 Simple Steps to Lower Your Risk of Developing a Hernia](#)

Symptoms of a Hernia During Pregnancy³

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.

Read [Hernia Pain: Know When to See a Doctor](#)

Treatment of a Hernia While Pregnant³

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 a hernia 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 and Surgical 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.⁸

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.

Depending on your specific circumstances, your doctor may elect to perform one of the following [surgical options](#) to fix your hernia:

- **Open Repair:** In an open repair, an incision is made at the site of the hernia. If the surgeon uses mesh, it is placed between layers of muscle for a durable repair.⁹ Depending on your surgical history, such as if a previous surgery has caused scar tissue, doctors may opt for this more traditional approach.
- **Laparoscopic Repair:** Laparoscopy is a type of minimally invasive surgery that only requires a small ‘keyhole’ incision. Laparoscopic repairs use a small camera and specialized minimally invasive tools for accuracy. Patients may experience a faster recovery following laparoscopic repair compared to an open surgery.¹⁰
- **Robotic Repair:** Similar to laparoscopic repair, a robotic hernia repair is a minimally invasive surgery requiring small incisions where the surgeon controls the procedure from a specialized robotic console.¹⁰ Patients may also experience a faster recovery following robotic surgery compared to an open surgery.¹¹

You should discuss these options with your doctor to see what option may be right for you. To learn more, check out our [Hernias and Pregnancy](#) blog.

1. <https://americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/changes-in-your-body/body-changes-during-pregnancy/> 2. 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. 3. <https://americanpregnancy.org/healthy-pregnancy/pregnancy-complications/hernia-during-pregnancy/> 4. <https://babybellyband.com/inguinal-hernia-during-pregnancy-mimic-varicies/> 5. <https://www.manchestersurgicalclinic.com/conditions/hernia/femoral-hernia> 6. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/hernia/> 7. <https://www.everydayhealth.com/hernia/during-pregnancy/> 8. <https://www.medstarhealth.org/blog/hernia-mesh-and-no-mesh-repair> 9. <https://www.nyp.org/patients-and-visitors/advances-consumers/issues/new-less-invasive-techniques-for-hernia-repair> 10. <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/treatments/17968-robotic-surgery-for-hernia-repair> 11. Healthwise Staff, Laparoscopic Inguinal Hernia Repair, University of Michigan Health. April 15, 2020.

