

Hernia Repair Recovery: FAQ, Lifestyle Changes, and Guidelines to Help You Get Back to Your Daily Activities



Recovery from hernia repair surgery often takes several weeks and may take longer. While in most cases you can eventually return to your normal active lifestyle, some lifestyle changes may be required after your operation. Read ahead for some frequently asked questions about recovering from a hernia repair and lifestyle guidelines.

A hernia is a physical opening in the belly or groin, often caused by increased pressure from activities such as coughing, lifting heavy items, or straining to pass stools¹. Treatment varies depending on the type and severity of the hernia, but often requires surgery to repair it. A hernia repair is generally an outpatient surgery – meaning that most patients can go home on the same day of their operation, though some patients may have to stay in the hospital for a few days. Returning to an active lifestyle is often possible for most patients, but there are several guidelines your doctor may tell you to

¹ <https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/15757-hernia>

² <https://www.intercoastalmedical.com/2020/11/18/hernia-facts-pain-types-surgery-and-recovery-time/>

follow to help you prevent a hernia in the future. Be sure to check with your doctor to discuss your own risks and limitations after surgery.

How long does it take to recover from hernia surgery?

The first question most people ask is how long will recovery from a hernia repair take. Recovery varies from person to person, but strenuous activity should be avoided for 4 - 6 weeks².

Surgery is a significant stressor on the body, and there are things that you can do to reduce complications after surgery. The following are some frequently asked questions by patients who have undergone a hernia repair.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ):

What should I do for the first few days after my hernia repair surgery?

Always follow your doctor or hospital's instructions for what to do after your surgery. Below are some things hernia repair patients typically do during the first few days post-surgery:

- Arrange for someone to collect you from the hospital and bring you home, as you won't be able to drive immediately after the procedure.
- Get plenty of rest and avoid lifting anything heavy for at least two weeks.
- If you have to cough, sneeze, or move, apply mild pressure to the site beforehand.
- Ask your doctor when you can shower after you get home. You may need to wait 48 hours after your surgery.

You will need to see your doctor for a follow-up visit after surgery. This visit is often scheduled within two weeks of your surgery date. The purpose of this visit is to help ensure your hernia is healing and to check for possible complications of surgery, like an infection. Depending on your recovery and the complexity of your surgery, your doctor may indicate a need for further follow-up visits during this evaluation. It is very important for you to attend your scheduled visits with your doctor to make sure your hernia is healing appropriately.

How long does the pain typically last after a hernia repair?

As with any surgery, you will experience some pain and discomfort after surgery. This pain is often well-managed with over-the-counter pain medications like ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Some doctors may prescribe other medicines, such as opioids, and will direct you how and when to take these.

If you have had laparoscopic or robotic surgery, you may also experience pain in your shoulder. This is normal and typically resolves in a day or so. Be sure to ask your doctor if you have any concerns.

How can I care for my incision at home?

It is vital to take care of your incision when you go home and to follow the wound care instructions from your doctor. Your doctor or healthcare team will likely give you instructions that may include:

- Wash the area daily with warm water and soap.
- Pat the area dry; never rub or handle vigorously as you may reopen the wound.
- If surgical tape is on the incision, leave it on for one week or until it falls off.
- If you have dissolvable stitches in the incision, your body will absorb these over time. Your doctor can advise you about this process.
- If you have staples closing the incision, your doctor will remove them at your follow-up appointment.
- You may cover the incision with a gauze bandage, which should be changed daily.

When can I go back to work after a hernia repair?

Depending on the type of hernia and surgery received, most people require anywhere from several days to weeks off of work after a hernia repair³. This timeline depends on the type of work you do and the severity of your hernia. Your doctor will provide a recommended timeline for your own

³ <https://www.surgicalassociatesofnorthtexas.com/blog/when-can-i-return-to-work-after-hernia-repair-surgery>

individual condition. For example, manual laborers may require more time off than those with an office job. Hernia repair recovery requires patience.

Can I drive after a hernia repair?

Your doctor will likely recommend that you ask someone to drive you home from surgery. It is typical for patients to be restricted from driving for up to two weeks after surgery to help avoid the physical strain of getting in and out of the car. In addition, some pain medications warn patients not to drive while taking them.

Can I play sports after a hernia repair?

Your doctor will advise you when it is okay for you to play sports again. Many patients return to their usual activity level a few weeks after surgery, but every person is different. Your healthcare team may recommend that you begin light walking as soon as possible after surgery but avoid lifting more than ten pounds and strenuous exercise for at least two weeks. You will likely need your doctor's approval prior to playing any sports.

What lifestyle changes can I make at home?

There are plenty of lifestyle changes you can make to help reduce some future risks. Be sure to ask your doctor about your potential risks, as well as what they recommend you do at home to help reduce the likelihood of them occurring.

1. **Diet** – There are no specific restrictions, but maintaining a healthy weight is essential. Diets low in fat and high in fiber are recommended to help prevent constipation and the recurrence of your hernia.
2. **Physical activity** – Taking short walks can help you maintain a healthy weight. Avoid vigorous exercise, such as weightlifting or biking until your doctor approves it.

3. **Avoid smoking** – Smoking can negatively affect your body’s ability to heal and increase your risk of infection. Many doctors recommend that you stop smoking for at least 4 weeks prior to your surgery and at least 4 weeks after.
4. **Manual handling** – Proper manual handling techniques when lifting or moving a heavy object can help prevent future hernias. Avoid twisting or stooping, and keep your head up when lifting something.

What are some possible complications of a hernia repair surgery?

Ask your doctor about the potential benefits and complications for your individual condition. Some common complications are:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain at the incision site
- Wound infection
- Swelling or a fluid collection around the incision
- Blood clots and deep vein thrombosis
- Hernia recurrence (the hernia returns)

Always call your doctor if you have any questions.

Seek emergency assistance immediately if you experience shortness of breath, unresolved bleeding or a loss of consciousness.

The guidance provided in this article follows general rules that should be discussed with your doctor. This article has been written and reviewed with the guidance of a medical health professional for informational and educational purposes only. It does not substitute for medical advice. If in doubt, always consult your doctor.