

Dr. Charles Harper's

THE HERNIA GUIDE

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WHAT IS A HERNIA?

Simply put, a hernia is a hole or weakness in the muscle and connective tissue of the abdomen or groin. These muscles are designed to keep your “insides” on the inside. When the abdominal wall is subjected to high pressure from coughing, sneezing, or lifting, a weakness can develop into a complete hole or defect. This causes tissue to pass from one area of the abdomen to another, or protrude out towards the skin, resulting in a visible bulge.



DR. CHARLES HARPER

**Board Certified
General Surgeon
specializing in:**

- **Hernia**
- **Gallbladder**
- **Appendectomy**
- **Small bowel**
- **Colon**
- **Breast**
- **Lipoma, cyst**

Dr. Harper is a board-certified general surgeon. He is a graduate of general surgery residency at Kansas City University - St. Mary's Medical Center. He has a passion for education and is currently an Associate Professor of Surgery for Kansas City University. He has been trained in open, minimally invasive, and robotic techniques to repair hernias, as well as all other general surgery procedures. He has received advanced training with the Da Vinci surgical robot. He is on staff at:

*Beacon Surgery Center,
Centerpoint Medical Center,
Centerpoint Surgical Center,
Lee's Summit Medical Center,
St. Mary's Medical Center,
St. Mary's Surgical Center,
and University Health Lakewood.*



WHAT DO HERNIAS FEEL LIKE?

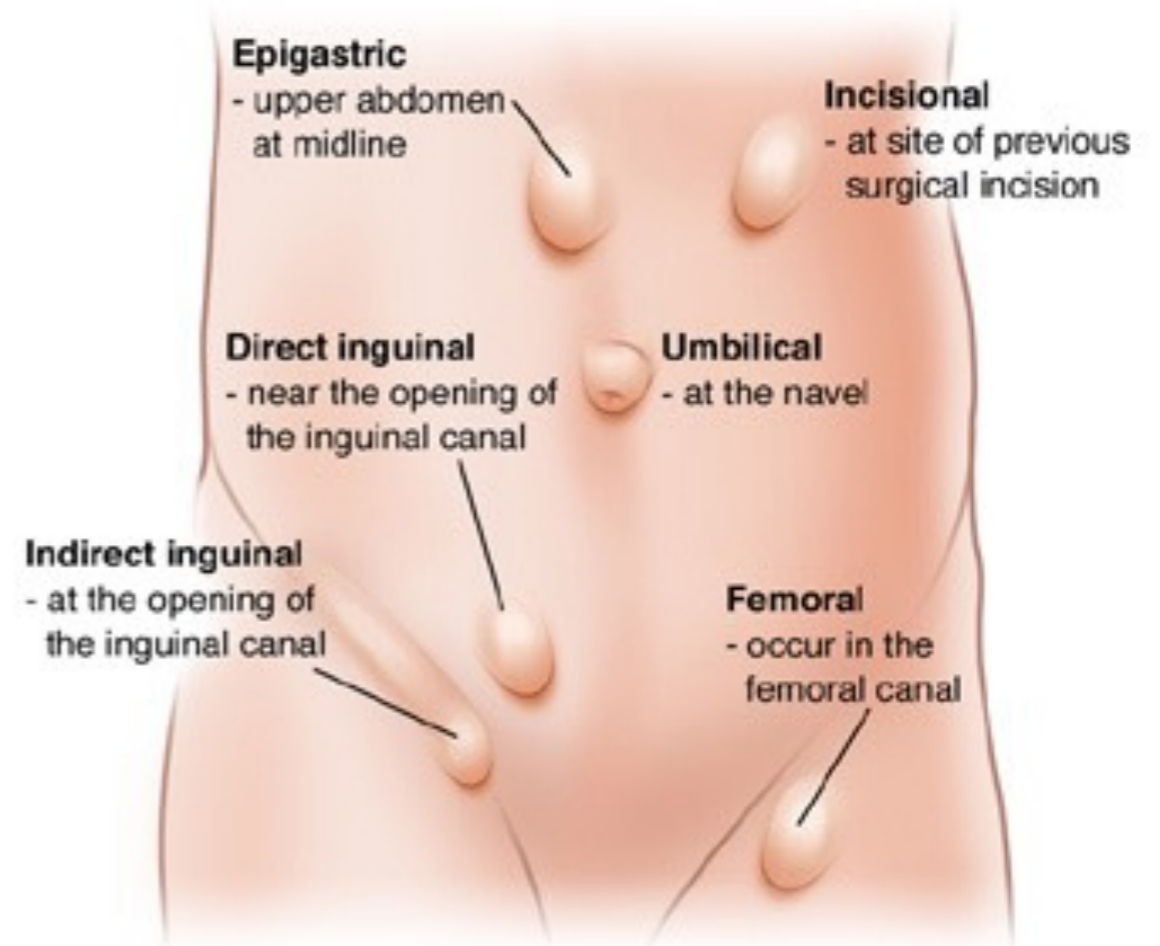
Hernias hurt! That aching pain in your groin or belly button might be a hernia - don't ignore it! The pain can vary between a dull ache or an occasional sharp, stabbing pain. Some types of hernias in the groin can cause a burning pain. Once hernias begin to cause discomfort, they are unlikely to ever stop. Some hernias are also visible or palpable as a bulge. This bulge may disappear when laying flat or when pushed back in. If the pain is severe or worsening, it could be a sign that the contents of the hernia are losing their blood supply. That can be an emergent situation. If you are experiencing severe, unrelenting pain, go to the emergency room and be sure to ask to see Dr. Harper!

What type of hernia do I have?

Hernias can develop almost anywhere in the abdomen. Most commonly, they develop in the groin (the area between the abdomen and the leg) or near the belly button (umbilicus).

Inguinal or Femoral (Groin) Hernia: Groin hernias can develop due to one of two reasons. One type is when a congenital passageway from the abdomen fails to close, allowing protrusion of abdominal contents towards the scrotum or groin. The second type occurs when a weak spot develops due to stress on the muscles. Because the groin is at the bottom of the abdomen, small or large intestine often travels into these hernias and can become trapped.

Ventral / Incisional Hernia: Ventral hernias are located on the front of the abdomen. When these occur without any previous surgery on the



abdomen, they are called ventral hernias because they are on the ventral (front) side of the body. When the hernia develops at a previous incision or surgical site, it is referred to as an incisional hernia. Once the muscle and connective tissue is opened during surgery, it is never quite as strong and can separate, becoming a hernia. Ventral and incisional hernias are high risk of containing bowel because of their location.

Umbilical Hernia: Umbilical (belly button) hernias develop due to a natural weakness from where the umbilical cord attaches during fetal development. Sometimes the attachment site fails to close. Over time and with repetitive stress, this defect can enlarge. Umbilical hernias most commonly contain fat and can also contain small or large intestine. Conditions such as cirrhosis or using peritoneal dialysis can worsen these (and any) hernias.

Hiatal Hernia: Hiatal (paraesophageal) hernias are somewhat different than the other hernia types. The esophagus passes through the diaphragm and empties into the stomach. Hiatal hernias occur when a portion of the stomach slips up through the normal hole in the diaphragm. These hernias range in severity based on how much of the stomach is above the diaphragm. The primary symptom of a hiatal hernia is reflux or heartburn. This is experienced as a burning in the chest, worse after laying flat on your back. These hernias are often diagnosed during endoscopy or incidentally on imaging obtained for other reasons.

Other Hernias: There are many other types of hernias that are less common. If you have been diagnosed with a hernia and would like a surgical opinion, contact Dr. Harper for an appointment.

What should I do about my hernia?

All hernias should be evaluated by a physician. You can call and make an appointment with Dr. Harper. Besides being examined, it is important to make sure the hernia is not an emergency. Nausea, vomiting, bloating, constipation, redness of the overlying skin, or worsening pain can all be signs that the hernia needs emergent attention. If this is the case, proceed to the emergency department. If a surgical evaluation is needed, make sure to ask for Dr. Harper!

How do I know if surgery is needed?

The decision to repair a hernia is made together between you and your surgeon. Hernias do not self-resolve, and short of surgery, there are no methods to repair them. Ultimately, the decision is made by weighing your current symptoms against the risks of surgery. For many, the risk of surgery

is low and symptoms are severe enough that surgery is the obvious choice. For others that have severe or chronic medical conditions, the decision to pursue surgery must be considered with more caution. Dr. Harper would be happy to sit and discuss your options and help you decide if surgery is the right plan. Call 816-246-0800 to make an appointment to see him today!

What types of surgeries are performed for hernias?

There are many techniques to fix hernias but the least invasive, most durable repair is the best one. Dr. Harper is a robotic and minimally invasive specialist. He uses the latest technology that allows him to repair hernias skillfully, which means less pain, earlier return to work, and smoother recovery.

What is recovery like?

Recovery from hernia surgery varies by the type of hernia, size, and if any additional procedures are required at the time of surgery. Most hernia procedures do not even require a hospital stay thanks to the minimally invasive technology and anesthesia techniques used. Incisional soreness and some discomfort are to be expected. That being said, most patients are pain-free within a few days. We do encourage a few weeks of limited activity to give the hernia repair time to fully heal.

What can I expect during my visit with Dr. Harper?

Dr. Harper will begin by getting a full description of your symptoms and medical history. The next part is a physical exam, where the hernia is assessed. After this, you will discuss if further testing is necessary or if surgery should be pursued. You can always expect to receive exceptional care from Dr. Harper and his staff.



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