

# What do you know about your risk for hernia?

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Could you be at risk for a [hernia](#)?

One expert gives the lowdown on hernias, who is most at risk for them, and how they are typically treated.

Dr. Harvey Rainville, a general surgeon at Hackensack Meridian Mountainside Medical Center in New Jersey, said a [hernia](#) is a defect or opening in your muscle layer through which an organ, such as your intestines, can poke through during or after strenuous activity.

Activities such as bowel movements, coughing, sneezing, laughing and bending increase pressure in the abdomen and can force an organ or tissue to squeeze through the opening. It is not uncommon for a hernia to "pop out" and then return to what looks like normal, but a hernia that's disappeared should still be taken seriously, Rainville said in a medical center news release.

Any hernia is potentially dangerous. If you suspect you have one, see your doctor.

## **Different types of hernias**

There are many types of hernias. People can be born with a hernia or develop one. The most common type is an [umbilical hernia](#), which develops through the belly button. This can occur in [young people](#) and adults. Belly button hernias can often appear as a protruding belly button. Women can notice this type of hernia when they become pregnant, Rainville noted.

Hernias of the groin ([inguinal hernias](#)) are also very common. The groin area has a natural anatomical defect. With too much pressure, that area can dilate and allow the tissue to bulge through.

## **Hernias are more common in men**

Men are much more likely to develop inguinal hernias than women because men have a small hole in their groin muscles for [blood vessels](#) to pass through to deliver blood to their testicles, Rainville said.

People who do strenuous work that involves heavy lifting can also develop hernias at a higher rate. Those who work sedentary jobs are at lower risk.

## **Hernias are not hereditary**

Some hernias occur at birth. An umbilical hernia occurs when part of the contents of the abdomen pokes through the abdominal wall inside the belly button. It appears as a bump under the [belly button](#). It's not painful and most umbilical hernias go away on their own by age 4 or 5.

Inguinal hernias will appear as a bump in the groin area, Rainville said. They can occur in newborns.

## **Hernias can cause symptoms**

Constipation, nausea and vomiting are symptoms of a strangulated hernia, which occurs when the blood supply to the herniated tissue is cut off. The strangulated tissue then releases toxins and infection into the bloodstream, which could lead to [sepsis](#) or death. Any hernia can become strangulated and cause a medical emergency, Rainville noted.

## **Treating hernias**

Most hernias can be diagnosed during a regular exam. You may also have a CT scan, which shows the size, location and type of tissues/organs affected.

Most hernias are treated with [minimally invasive laparoscopic or robotic surgery](#). The procedure usually takes 30 minutes to an hour and in most cases is a same-day operation, allowing patients to go home after surgery, Rainville said.

Recovery is quick for most patients and many return to normal activity within a few days. Restrictions after surgery include no heavy lifting and no exercise for 3 to 4 weeks.

Hernias used to have a 10% to 15% chance of recurring in patients, but newer surgical techniques have decreased the chance of recurrence to 1% to 2%, but they still can happen. Diabetic patients have a higher risk for hernias, especially if their blood sugar is poorly controlled. People with [autoimmune disorders](#), a high [body mass index](#), healing issues, or a smoking habit are also more likely to have hernias, Rainville said.

**More information:** For more on hernias, head to [Johns Hopkins University](#).

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