

# That Lump Might Be a Hernia



A hernia is a tear in a muscle wall that develops from a point of weakness into a localized hole or defect. Most commonly, they occur in the groin and abdominal walls. Abdominal fat or even organs such as intestines can bulge through the defect. That is why a hernia might feel like a lump in your groin or abdomen. They often hurt or get larger when you cough, lift something heavy or strain to go to the bathroom.

Some people are born with hernias. Others develop them because they are overweight, lift heavy objects, have chronic coughs, have constipation or are physically active. Your organs also can push through a scar if you've had surgery on your abdomen.

## Identifying a Hernia

Different types of hernias occur in different areas of the body:

- **Groin hernias**, also known as inguinal hernias, are the most common type of hernias.

- Women are more likely to have **femoral hernias**. These occur on the upper thigh.
- Babies often have **umbilical hernias**. These form because of a weakness in the muscles around the belly button and can occasionally resolve on their own. Adults can develop this type of hernia, too.
- **Incisional hernias** occur because of an incompletely healed surgical wound and are usually located on the abdominal wall.
- **Hiatal hernias** can cause heartburn or acid reflux disease. They develop when the stomach bulges into the lower chest because of a weakness in the diaphragm.

## Treatment Stops the Pain

Talk with your doctor if you think you have a hernia. It is advisable to have them repaired surgically to relieve symptoms and to prevent what is called a strangulated hernia. This rare but serious complication occurs when the misplaced organ loses its blood supply and dies.

**COULD YOU HAVE A HERNIA?** Talk with your doctor about your symptoms. For a physician referral, call 713.222.CARE (2273) or visit [memorialhermann.org](http://memorialhermann.org).

"Surgery is usually on an outpatient basis and generally well-tolerated," says Rick Ngo, M.D., a board-certified general surgeon affiliated with Memorial Hermann Memorial City Medical Center. "The recovery period is typically one to three weeks. Recent advances in hernia surgery, namely laparoscopic hernia surgery, have shortened the recovery period and decreased postoperative pain. This type of minimally invasive surgery uses a surgical camera and instruments placed through several small incisions."



Dr. Ngo is a board-certified general surgeon specializing in minimally invasive hernia surgery.