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# What to Expect pre and post Hernia Surgery with Hernia Clinic Hampshire

Thanks to our new safe surgical technique, hernia surgery is efficient and relatively pain-free in the recovery period.

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All the information you need to make an informed choice about hernia surgery is within 'Hernia Surgery' section of our website and this leaflet. Please take the time to read and digest the information.

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## What happens on the day of your hernia surgery?

When you have an appointment for hernia surgery at the Hernia Clinic Hampshire, your procedure typically follows these steps:

- You'll have had a pre-assessment sometime before and, depending on the results of a skin swab taken at that pre-assessment, may need to wash with a special shower gel for two days prior to surgery.
- If you are having an inguinal hernia repair please bring the hernia support briefs you have bought with you on the day of surgery to put on after the operation is completed.
- Please ensure that you do not eat anything or drink anything except liquids that are clear (i.e. water, squash, black tea or black coffee) for six hours prior to arriving at hospital for surgery. Do not drink any type of liquid for 2 hours before arriving.
- Take your medicines as normal, except for any medicines you're specifically asked not to take at your pre-assessment consultation.
- On arrival, you'll be met by reception staff who will take you to your room. Nursing staff will run through the final paperwork and checks and help you change into a gown, dressing gown and TED compression stockings.
- A member of the surgical team will come and see you to go through the final bits of paperwork, confirm your consent to treatment and run through the plans for the day. They'll also mark up the side of your body to be repaired. Sometimes there is a wait of a few hours to get into theatre. We appreciate this can be annoying but experience has taught us there is no other way to run the theatre. We advise you bring a book or something to occupy your time calmly if you have a bit of a wait.
- When you are ready you'll then be taken down to theatre to meet the operating room staff. The anaesthetist, will insert a cannula into a vein in your arm or hand and make sure you're feeling relaxed..
- Once you're ready, the surgeon arrives to administer the local anaesthetic. While the anaesthetic gets to work, the anaesthetist will check you're comfortable and relaxed on the bed.
- During this time we will shave the operative area (if needed), prepare the area with antiseptic wash and arrange some drapes.
- Your surgeon will check you can't feel anything in the area of the operation, From when the surgeon starts the operation it takes between 35 and 50 minutes to complete.



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- Once surgery is complete, you're taken out to the recovery area, where you'll be for 15-20 minutes while observations are carried out.
- A nurse will check to make sure you're comfortable and happy, then you'll return to your private room, where you'll be given something to eat and drink and you can get dressed. You will be wearing your hernia support briefs if you have brought these with you.
- We usually wait for you to pass water before we discharge you, which can be two to three hours after surgery has ended.
- The surgery and trips to and from theatre can take an hour or so, and you may be in your room for a few hours from arrival before going down to theatre.
- If covid restrictions are no longer in place you are welcome to bring a friend or family member with you who can be with you in your room pre and post surgery.
- You will need to arrange to have someone pick you up after surgery as you cannot drive. You will also need someone with you overnight post surgery or if preferred you have the option to book and stay overnight in the hospital.



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## Recovery and recuperation from a hernia operation under local anaesthetic

By having your hernia surgery under local anaesthetic we are blocking the body's ability to know that you have had an operation. This minimises the body's reaction to the operation, which under general anaesthetic manifests as pain, stiffness and feeling unwell. It is expected that with simple pain relief medication you will remain comfortable.

### **Bruising**

The length of time you will need to take simple pain relief is related to the amount of bruising. Local anaesthetic repairs have a quick recovery time, but the bruise nearly always looks frightful. It is usually a superficial bruise making you look literally 'black & blue'. This can also manifest as some swelling and affect the scrotum and penis, top of your thigh and extend into your back. No matter how large the bruise, some simple pain relief and waiting up to a few weeks will fix it. Bruising is complicated. There are a lot of factors that influence the extent of bruising, including:

- Size and complexity of the hernia
- How the hernia is repaired – open or keyhole
- Being overweight
- Medical conditions that affect bone marrow and tissue healing
- Regular blood-thinning medication
- Age and general frailty
- The 'luck of the draw'



## Wound dressings

We nearly always advise to leave the wound alone and wait for it to heal by itself over time. This is approximately 12 days. The skin edges are closed with a suture that is invisible under the skin, so there are no sutures to see. If you can feel an end it will disappear in a few weeks.

You will have two or three layers of dressing.

**1. Top layer (Sometimes substituted by a pair of hernia support briefs - see details below):**

The top layer (layer three) is called a pressure dressing and is there to apply firm pressure to the wound to reduce bruising.

**Hernia Support Briefs instead of pressure dressing**

For those having an open inguinal hernia repair under local anaesthetic we advise that you buy a pair of hernia support briefs to wear in place of the pressure dressing as discussed in your consultation. The hernia support briefs work better at reducing bruising than the pressure dressing. Some find these add comfort and wear them for a week or 10 days. Others find them uncomfortable, but we ask you bear with them for a minimum of 48 hours while the clots from surgery stabilize. Wear them under your clothes and in bed. You can take them off to shower and go to the toilet. We have found that the better the fit the better the results so please order a pair having recently measured your body and order the accurate size needed. You can also use them as a truss for a few weeks if waiting for surgery.

**2. Middle layer:**

The middle layer (layer two) is a flat waterproof dressing. You can shower with it on and then pat it dry. It may last 12 days but you might need to change it once or twice. The fewer times it is changed the better as it reduces the risk of a minor wound infection.

**3. Bottom layer:**

The bottom layer (layer one) of butterfly sutures needs to stay on for 12 days. At 12 days, you can remove all the dressings and the wound should be healed: dry and clean. Simply washing it with a wet flannel at this stage to remove any last clots



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## **Pain Relief**

The best way to manage pain relief is to take it before any pain develops or becomes present enough to reduce your mobility or makes you feel unwell. If you don't actively try to control the pain, hernia surgery can be painful.

If you do actively manage it then recovery from hernia surgery should be reasonably straightforward.

To maximise your post surgery comfort and recovery we advise that before the anaesthetic wears off (and before leaving hospital) you start taking the paracetamol and ibuprofen prescribed to you on your discharge before leaving hospital.

It is common with any open hernia surgery to feel a numb patch or area of altered sensation around the wound. It is the skin nerves recovering from the bruising and any surgical damage. The area involved fills in and becomes more normal as recovery progresses. Please note it takes up to 6 months to resolve but even then a small percentage can have a permanent numb patch about the size of a 50p piece around the region of the scar. Patients can expect this to fade slowly overtime.

### **Paracetamol**

Take two paracetamol capsules regularly four times a day. This medicine has few/no side effects and is safe in nearly everyone.

### **Ibuprofen**

Take two ibuprofen capsules, regularly to start with, three times a day. Always take them with food. Some patients can experience problems with this medicine as it can cause stomach irritation and affect kidney function. However, taking it for 48-72 hours with food should be safe even for those warned off it in the past. Please discuss this with me on day of surgery if you have any concerns about taking it. Ibuprofen is a very effective painkiller, especially when taken with paracetamol.

### **Dihydrocodeine**

This is a powerful opioid painkiller with a long list of side effects. Only take it if needed. You can take it up to four times a day with the paracetamol and ibuprofen as instructed above. It can cause constipation, nausea, poor appetite, headaches, drowsiness and affect concentration. You should not operate machinery while taking this and you may need a laxative with it. We will send you home with one.



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## **Mobility and Returning to Day-to-day Activity**

The other significant factor involved in recovery is mobility.

**Key rule for best outcome : Early mobilisation 48 hours after surgery is essential – particularly with the older generation.**

Being still will only worsen stiffness and soreness making your recovery longer and more painful. Keep moving.

**The first 48 hours are when the wound is stabilizing and clots stabilizing so that bruising is restricted. Be gentle with yourself in this period but remain mobile.**

You can shower or wash at a basin from day one.

From day 3 there are no absolute limitations on returning to activity as long as you follow this rule:

**Key rule for best outcome: If it hurts (more than just being a bit uncomfortable (without painkillers) stop doing it and try again in a couple of days.**

For driving the DVLA states that you must be able to do an emergency stop. It is illegal to drive a car if you cannot do this. Some insurers have time limits in the small print of their contracts so it can be worth calling them to make sure you are covered to drive again. On average after hernia surgery expect not to drive for 10 days.

Most people can walk a mile and carry a small bag of shopping within a week. Some are walking the dog from day 3, others not till the end of week 2. Everyones recovery is individual to them.

**WARNING: Most problems arise from simple activity such as gardening or DIY when it is too easy to forget you have just had surgery and try to lift, move push things that are too heavy from a weak position. Please be careful doing these activities in the first 4-6 weeks even when you feel very comfortable.**

To have a bath or swim the wound needs to be healed and dry (typically once all the dressings have come off after 12 days).



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Sport enthusiasts should expect to return to exercise carefully from 14-21 days after surgery. It is best to try aerobic exercise, such as running, swimming and exercise classes first and for a smaller distance or duration than you usually managed. Build it up again as comfort allows. Cycling can be uncomfortable for several weeks.

Expect it to take at least 6 weeks to lift weights in the gym. If lifting weights start with light weights that are comfortable and increase the number of repetitions before lifting heavy weights at a low repetition.

**In short, try and use common sense and follow the key rules for best outcome.**





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## Follow Up

You will have a follow up after 4-6 weeks once recovered.

If you need to be seen before this then please contact us, or the hospital you were treated at if urgent, to arrange an earlier review. If you have other questions in the meantime please contact us and we will get back to you asap.

## How to prevent a hernia from re-occurring

- Be careful and mindful of how you feel and what you are hoping to do and achieve.
- If you smoke, make this an opportunity to stop. Smoking causes weak connective tissue and the repair will never be as strong as it should be.
- If you have a BMI >25 use this opportunity to try and lose weight. Excess weight adds pressure on the repair especially when abdominal pressure is increased.
- If you cough, sneeze or laugh hold the repair with your hand to help support it. If you find the hernia support briefs comfortable continue to use them without the padding.
- Follow the above warning about gardening and DIY.

**As a patient of the Hernia Clinic Hampshire you are in the best possible care but it is ultimately up to you as to how much you follow our post surgery advice and information.**

**All the information you need to make an informed choice about hernia surgery is within 'Hernia Surgery' section of our website and is part of the consenting process.**

**If after reading this a couple of times you still have questions please email them to us prior to your surgery so we can answer them and make sure you are comfortable with and understand what you are agreeing to and why.**

**We will go through a consent form and both sign what we have agreed to on the day of surgery, but you must not leave it to the day of surgery to feel informed about your decision. If you decide against surgery you need to appreciate the consequences of that decision too.**