

and less pain. There is preperitoneal mesh-plasty or incisional hernia repair for inguinal hernia which occurs when contents of the abdomen — usually fat or part of the small intestine — bulge through a weak area in the lower abdominal wall) as well.

Post operation, the patient should have small meals, avoid coughing and take precautions against constipation so as to prevent strain on any muscle, recommends nutritionist Dr Geeta Dharmatti.

"Weight management is an important part of prevention and treatment of hernia. Muscle gain and fat loss should be the goal.

Muscle strengthening with proteins, along with fibre and healthy diet should be part of weight-loss therapy. Avoid refined foods, alcohol, smoking, sugar and large meals," she says.

Prevention is better than cure

Like in most diseases, lifestyle and dietary changes are a must for hernia. Having said that, Dr Gandhi believes that eating healthy alone might not prevent it as there are other contributing factors as well. "However, once you have undergone a hernia repair surgery, it is imperative to lose weight, as putting on weight post-surgery

“Once you have undergone a hernia repair surgery, it is imperative to lose weight. Putting on weight post-surgery can lead to recurrence of hernia

—Dr Jignesh Gandhi, Consulting Laparoscopic and Gastrointestinal Surgeon



can lead to a recurrence. Regular walks and exercise for muscle strengthening need to be under supervision to avoid further strain," says Dr Gandhi.

Dr Bijlani adds: "While congenital hernia cannot be prevented, in other types of hernia, the incidence can be decreased by a healthy and active lifestyle. Do not avoid

medical consultations for any chronic urinary or respiratory problems (like chronic cough). For women, pre- and post-natal exercises to maintain a good abdominal muscle tone after pregnancy and delivery are a must. Women with lax abdominal muscles, especially after multiple pregnancies or a caesarean section, are known to get

abdominal hernia. In such cases incisional hernia could develop if the scar is weak and the muscle tone is poor."

Dr Dharmatti recommends avoiding unwanted calories that tend to deposit fat. Kota, for instance, has switched to jowari roti, brown rice and veggies and avoids non-vegetarian food as much as possible.

"While I don't exercise, I do make it a point to walk (even within the house) after every meal. This along with eating low-carb meals, has indeed helped me manage my weight post-surgery. I have lost eight kilos since my delivery last August," she informs.

The lowdown on hernias

Anyone can get a hernia. Here's what you can do to deal with it

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Shravya Kota, experienced bouts of deep pain in her abdomen after her third delivery in October last year. Initially she dismissed it as post-delivery discomfort, but when she couldn't bend, or even hold her baby for too long, things got difficult. "After experiencing three months of sharp pain, I consulted a gynaecologist who referred me to a surgeon. I was diagnosed with umbilical hernia and was advised immediate surgery," says the 29-year-old Ghansoli resident. After a simple laparoscopic operation, Kota, an IT engineer by profession, was home in three days.

Her surgeon Dr Jignesh Gandhi, Consulting Laparoscopic and Gastrointestinal Surgeon with Hiranandani Hospital, Vashi explains: "A hernia is an abnormal protrusion of an organ, (most commonly the intestine) through an

opening created in the walls of the abdominal cavity." There are three kinds of hernia. Umbilical hernia is when the intestines bulge through their abdominal wall near the belly button. When there is an opening in the diaphragm, the stomach might bulge up to the chest to cause Hiatus hernia; and incisional hernia is when the intestines may push through a incision scar or the surrounding area. "It's a common problem worldwide," adds Dr Gandhi.

What causes hernia?

About five years ago, Dr Rajesh Bijlani, Consultant Surgeon, Kohinoor Hospital, used to see two to three hernia patients per week. The number has now gone up to five. In some cases, the hernia is congenital (from birth) and goes away as children grow up. In other cases, it occurs due to a persistent increase in intra-abdominal pressure. For instance, a patient with an enlarged prostate or one with chronic cough or constipation, stands a higher chance of hernia. In others, it

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could happen after a previous operation has left a scar weak. "In most cases, hernia is in the groin, where a small opening exists for the important spermatic cord structures to pass. In a hernia, this opening gets widened and even intestines start protruding," explains Dr Bijlani.

"Smoking, chronic constipation and chronic cough are factors that might lead to the development of hernia. Unaccustomed and unsupervised heavy, body-building exercises can be a

precipitating factor as well," says Dr Gandhi.

According to Dr Bijlani, the factors for higher incidence of hernia in India now are increasing average age of the population, more sedentary lifestyles, lack of exercise, and higher number of smokers. People who suffer from asthma or people with a chronic persistent cough are liable to get a hernia due to repeated stress on the abdomen.

"That's because coughing and sneezing cause violent contracting of the abdominal muscles and raise the intra-abdominal pressure which is predisposed to hernia formation. Also people with urinary complaints — who strain while passing urine or have poor flow of urine (problems of prostate or stricture) — should consult a doctor early and get treated," Dr Bijlani adds.

Read the symptoms

As in the case of Kota, patients often complain of swelling in the groin area, near the umbilicus or any part of the abdomen. When it gets severe or complicated, they experience discomfort and pain.

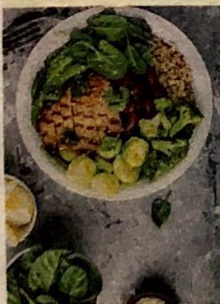
"In most cases, the symptom is just a swelling or a bulge that appears in the standing position and disappears on lying down. In some cases, pain may even be absent. The bulge increases in size with time and could cause severe problems if there is obstruction or strangulation of the hernia — it can lead to a lot of pain and vomiting," explains Dr Gandhi.

Talking surgery

"Once hernia is formed, surgery is the only solution. There is no alternative," says Dr Bijlani. Hernia can be removed with Minimal Invasive Surgery (MIS) and robotic tech-

THE NUTRITIONIST RECOMMENDS

Dr Geeta Dharmatti gives a lowdown on what you should and shouldn't eat to help prevent hernia



- 👍 Increase fibre intake through fruits and cooked vegetables. Large amount of raw food may cause increased risk of inflammation in hiatus hernia. Opt for vegetable soups and juices (4-5 servings daily), and fruits (2 servings) to aid good bowel movement.
- 👍 Add Vitamin A to your diet through carrot, tomato and beet juice for good tissue repair.
- 👍 Increase healthy proteins (dals/legumes) that are well cooked, dairy (in limited amounts), fresh curd, nuts (in recommended quantity), home-cooked unprocessed meat/ chicken/ fish, and fibre from whole grains, fruits and vegetables.



- 👎 Processed foods, sweets, fried foods, and bakery products increase the risk of acid reflux and hence symptoms of hiatus hernia
- 👎 Acidic and over-fermented foods (sour idli/ dosa), vinegar, canned foods may also cause acid reflux
- 👎 Added sugars make one gain weight and increases inflammation of hernia