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Laparoscopic hernia repair: A minimally invasive option

BY DR. THOMAS ROODHOUSE

Often times I see patients who have put off their hernia repair until they can no longer take the discomfort or they require an emergency repair.

Unfortunately, many people think of a hernia as a condition that can simply be “dealt with.” What they do not realize is that a hernia, regardless of whether or not it is causing pain, will start to become larger through the normal rigors of everyday life.

Thankfully, through technological advances, repairs can be done through laparoscopic hernia repair. This is a minimally invasive alternative to open hernia repair surgery.

Understanding what a hernia is will lead to a better understanding of the importance of having a repair

done. A hernia is a gap or hole in the tissue that holds muscles in place.

When the inside layers of the abdominal muscle weaken a bulge or tear can occur. This allows an organ or fatty tissue to squeeze through a weak spot in the abdominal wall resulting in a hernia.

Engaging in activities that cause an increase in pressure in the abdomen, including lifting heavy objects without stabilizing the abdominal muscles; diarrhea or constipation; persistent coughing or sneezing; and weakened muscles due to obesity, poor nutrition, and smoking can result in a hernia.

Patients often feel a bulge, pop or pull sensation after lifting a heavy object or post-surgery.

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HERNIA: Lap surgery has quicker recovery

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Hernias may cause discomfort, pain or other potentially serious problems.

The most common areas where they occur are in the groin (inguinal), belly button (umbilical), and the site of a previous operation (incisional). Hernias do not get better over time, nor will they go away without medical treatment.

Laparoscopic (lap) hernia repair is performed with a few small incisions versus the large incision needed for open surgery.

The laparoscope and camera allow the surgeon to view the hernia from the inside and pull/push the organs or tissue that may be protruding through, back inside the body. A special mesh screen will cover the hole, which will be held in place by dissolvable sutures.

The procedure itself takes about 45 minutes to two hours and most patients can return home the same day.

The recovery time is usually three to seven days, with instructions to rest and avoid heavy lifting during recovery. A follow-up with the surgeon should occur a week after the procedure.

Multiple factors come in to play when deciding whether hernia repair done laparoscopically is appropriate.

Lap hernia repair is an appealing choice over open surgery due to its need for a small incision, possibilities of less pain and less scarring, and an overall quicker recovery time.

Lap hernia repair can also be a good option for patients with recurring hernias.

As with other laparoscopic procedures, underlying health concerns, previous surgeries, and patient preference will be considered before deciding on either option.

While it is good to know there are options for hernia repair, prevention is always the best medicine.

There are ways to stop a hernia from developing.

Not smoking, limiting heavy lifting, following post-surgical care instructions, keeping blood sugar levels in line, and overall good nutrition, such as eating enough protein and ensuring good blood flow, are all important to prevention.

If you notice a hole or gap, something pushing through your abdomen or groin, or experience a burning or sharp pain in the area, contact your physician.

DR. THOMAS ROODHOUSE is a board-certified surgeon with the Attleboro Surgical Group. He received his medical degree from the University of Illinois College of Medicine. For more information on the lap procedure, call Attleboro Surgical Group at 508-226-7788.