

Road to Recovery: Hernia Repair FAQ, Lifestyle Changes, and Guidelines to Help You Get Back to Your Daily Activities



Recovery from hernia repair surgery often takes several weeks and may take longer. While in most cases you can eventually return to your normal active lifestyle, some lifestyle changes may be required after your operation. Always ask your doctor any questions you may have. Each patient will have a different post-operative recovery and activity level. Read ahead for some frequently asked questions about recovering from a hernia repair and lifestyle guidelines.

What is a hernia?

A hernia is a physical opening in the belly or groin, often caused by increased pressure from activities such as coughing, lifting heavy items, or straining to pass stools.¹ Treatment varies depending on the type and severity of the hernia, but often requires surgery to repair it. A hernia repair is generally an outpatient surgery – meaning that most patients can go home on the same day of their operation, though some patients may have to stay in the hospital for a few days. Returning to an active lifestyle is often possible for most patients, but there are several guidelines your doctor may tell you to follow to help you prevent a hernia in the future. Be sure to check with your doctor to discuss your own risks and limitations after surgery.

How long does it take to recover from hernia surgery?

The first question most people ask is how long will recovery from a hernia repair take. Recovery varies from person to person, but strenuous activity should be avoided for 4-6 weeks.²

Surgery is a significant stressor on the body, and there are things that you can do to help reduce complications after surgery.

What should I do for the first few days after my hernia repair surgery?

Always follow your doctor or hospital's instructions for what to do after your surgery. Below are some things hernia repair patients typically do during the first few days post-surgery:

- Arrange for someone to collect you from the hospital and bring you home, as you won't be able to drive immediately after the procedure.
- Get plenty of rest and avoid lifting anything heavy for at least two weeks.
 - If you have to cough, sneeze, or move, apply mild pressure to the site beforehand.
 - Ask your doctor when you can shower after you get home. You may need to wait 48 hours after your surgery.

You will need to see your doctor for a follow-up visit after surgery. This visit is often scheduled within two weeks of your surgery date. The purpose of this visit is to help ensure your hernia is healing and to check for possible complications of surgery, like an infection. Depending on your recovery and the complexity of your surgery, your doctor may indicate a need for further follow-up visits during this evaluation. It is very important for you to attend your scheduled visits with your doctor to make sure your hernia is healing appropriately.

How long does the pain typically last after a hernia repair?

As with any surgery, you will experience some pain and discomfort after surgery. This pain is often well-managed with over-the-counter pain medications like ibuprofen and acetaminophen. Some doctors may prescribe other medicines, such as opioids, and will direct you how and when to take these. If you have had laparoscopic or robotic surgery, you may also experience pain in your shoulder. This is normal and typically resolves in a day or so. Be sure to ask your doctor if you have any concerns.

How can I care for my incision at home?

It is vital to take care of your incision when you go home and to follow the wound care instructions from your doctor. Your doctor or healthcare team will likely give you instructions that may include:

- Wash the area daily with warm water and soap.
- Pat the area dry; never rub or handle vigorously as you may reopen the wound.
 - If surgical tape is on the incision, leave it on for one week or until it falls off.
 - If you have dissolvable stitches in the incision, your body will absorb these over time. Your doctor can advise you about this process.
- If you have staples closing the incision, your doctor will remove them at your follow-up appointment.
- You may cover the incision with a gauze bandage, which should be changed daily.

When can I go back to work after a hernia repair?

Depending on the type of hernia and surgery received, most people require anywhere from several days to weeks off of work after a hernia repair.³ This timeline depends on the type of work you do and the severity of your hernia. Your doctor will provide a recommended timeline for your own individual condition. For example, manual laborers may require more time off than those with an office job. Hernia repair recovery requires patience.



Can I drive after a hernia repair?

Your doctor will likely recommend that you ask someone to drive you home from surgery. It is typical for patients to be restricted from driving for up to two weeks after surgery to help avoid the physical strain of getting in and out of the car. In addition, some pain medications warn patients not to drive while taking them.

Can I play sports after a hernia repair?

Your doctor will advise you when it is okay for you to play sports again. Many patients return to their usual activity level a few weeks after surgery, but every person is different. Your healthcare team may recommend that you begin light walking as soon as possible after surgery but avoid lifting more than ten pounds and strenuous exercise for at least two weeks. You will likely need your doctor's approval prior to playing any sports.

What lifestyle changes can I make at home?

There are plenty of lifestyle changes you can make to help reduce some future risks. Be sure to ask your doctor about your potential risks, as well as what they recommend you do at home to help reduce the likelihood of them occurring.

- **Diet** – There are no specific restrictions, but maintaining a healthy weight is essential. Diets low in fat and high in fiber are recommended to help prevent constipation and the recurrence of your hernia.
- **Physical activity** – Taking short walks can help you maintain a healthy weight. Avoid vigorous exercise, such as weightlifting or biking until your doctor approves it.
- **Avoid smoking** – Smoking can negatively affect your body's ability to heal and increase your risk of infection. Many doctors recommend that you stop smoking for at least 4 weeks prior to your surgery and at least 4 weeks after.
- **Manual handling** – Proper manual handling techniques when lifting or moving a heavy object can help prevent future hernias. Avoid twisting or stooping, and keep your head up when lifting something.

Exercises That Can Aid in Recovering from Hernia Surgery⁴

There are some simple exercises and movements you can do post-surgery to help you on your road to recovery. But, know that they are not always one-size-fits-all. Read on for a handful of the most common movements your doctor may allow you to do after hernia repair. As always, before beginning a new routine, talk to your doctor for advice regarding exercise and what options/movements would be most beneficial for your specific needs and which exercises you should avoid.

- **Deep Breathing** – Many times after abdominal surgery, patients take shallow breaths because deep breaths can be painful. It's important to take several, conscious, deep breaths a few times a day and clear any phlegm or sputum with controlled coughing. Talk to your doctor about what can help with your specific case.
- **Walk Around** – One of the best movements you can do post-hernia surgery is to get up and get moving. Walking around not only helps your circulation it also encourages your gut to keep working. Plus, walking can aid in speedier recovery and in the prevention of infection and clots.
- **Leg Exercises** – Keep your legs strong so you can move around more easily and keep circulation going to help prevent blood clots.
 - **Ankle flex:** Flex and stretch your ankles, 10 repetitions at a time.
 - **Knee pushes:** Strengthen the back of your thighs by lying flat on your back and pushing the back of your knee (one at a time) down into the bed, hold for a few seconds and relax.
 - **Leg straightens:** Sit on the edge of the bed, feet on the floor with your knees bent at 90 degrees. Straighten out each leg at a time, hold for a few seconds, then return your feet to the floor with your knees bent at 90 degrees.
- **Abdominal Exercises** – Help strengthen your core muscles and prevent a hernia from coming back by performing simple abdominal exercises like:
 - **Button pulls:** Lie on your back with your knees bent (feet on the bed) and hands on your hips. Take a deep breath in through your nose, then, as you breathe out, pull in your belly button towards your spine, hold for a few seconds, then relax and breathe normally.
 - **Pelvic tilts:** Lie on your back with your knees bent (feet on the bed) and hands under the lower back. Tighten your abdominal muscles and tilt your bottom forwards to flatten your spine down on your hands. Hold for a few seconds and return to the starting position.

- **Core Tightening:** Standing, tighten core, pull belly button to spine. Repeat.



What are some possible complications of a hernia repair surgery?

Ask your doctor about the potential benefits and complications for your individual condition. Some common complications are:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Pain at the incision site
- Wound infection
- Swelling or a fluid collection around the incision
- Blood clots and deep vein thrombosis
- Hernia recurrence (the hernia returns)

Always call your doctor if you have any questions. Seek emergency assistance immediately if you experience shortness of breath, unresolved bleeding or a loss of consciousness. This article is for informational and educational purposes only. It does not substitute for medical advice. If in doubt, always [consult your doctor](#).

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