

Only way to treat hernias

Inguinal hernia is common among infants and people over 50 years of age. It occurs when organs push through a weak spot in one's groin muscle, causing a bulge to appear in the groin or scrotum. The bulge may hurt. About four per cent of people over 45 years old have it, and the risk increases with age. Men are more vulnerable than women.

Surgery is the only way to deal with it. Apart from traditional open surgery, laparoscopic surgery, also known as 'minimally invasive surgery' is becoming more common nowadays. It involves making three small incisions in the abdomen. This way, it's less painful and the wounds heal faster.

It is especially useful for treating patients with two hernias – one on each side of the abdomen. Compared with open surgery which needs two large incisions, only one set of incisions is needed for laparoscopic surgery to treat both hernias.

However, laparoscopic surgery cannot be carried out on patients who had undergone major abdomen operations or who suffer from a condition called 'strangulation' in which the blood supply to the intestine is cut off and may cause death.

Infants with inguinal hernia normally have it at birth. In the case of adults, it is usually caused by a weakness in the abdominal wall. In severe cases, strangulation may occur.