

Peristomal Hernia Management

What is a peristomal hernia?

It is when a loop of bowel bulges through an opening in the muscle that was made by the surgeon for the stoma to pass through. Peristomal hernia is one of the most common problems after stoma surgery.

How would I know if I have a peristomal hernia?

Most people with a peristomal hernia notice a bulge around the stoma. If you suspect you have a peristomal hernia, contact your health care provider for an evaluation. Other possible signs are:

- Abdominal pain or pressure in the area around the stoma
- Hard time passing stool (colostomy or ileostomy)
- Inability to keep a good pouch seal
- Changes in the stoma shape: if it becomes flatter or larger
- Increased skin irritation around the stoma

Most peristomal hernias don't require surgery but if you have any of the symptoms listed below, call your surgeon:

- Severe pain in the abdomen in the area around the stoma
- Redness, swelling or warmth in the skin around your ostomy
- Nausea or vomiting
- No output from stoma
- Changes in stoma color - if it becomes darker in color (burgundy or black)

Tips for management

The type of treatment for peristomal hernia is based on how bothersome the symptoms are. Rarely, the problem is handled surgically because the hernia often recurs. Usually the hernia is managed by avoiding activities that might cause the hernia to increase in size and by providing support to the abdominal muscles around the stoma.

Activities that increase abdominal pressure or strain the abdominal muscles can cause the hernia to get bigger. Some suggestions to help prevent the hernia from increasing in size are listed below:

- Avoid weight gain as this increases abdominal pressure.
- Avoid heavy lifting whenever possible. If you must lift, use good body mechanics. Place your feet apart (one foot in front of the other, keep your back straight and bend your knees). Keep the object you are lifting close to your body.
- Avoid straining your abdominal muscles when possible. Actions like holding your breath bearing down and heavy weight lifting can cause abdominal strain.
- Avoid constipation if you have a colostomy or urostomy. Drink plenty of fluids and eat a healthy diet to maintain regular bowel movements.
- If you feel a bulge around your stoma when you cough, sneeze or throw up, place your hand over the stoma to provide some counter-pressure.
- Wear a support garment, such as a custom-made hernia belt. This belt can help support the area around the hernia and prevent it from increasing in size. You would put the belt on while lying down, usually before getting out of bed in the morning and can remove it at bedtime. Your health care provider can make a referral to the outpatient ostomy nurses for a fitting.
- A healthy lifestyle is important: maintain good eating habits and a healthy weight and avoid smoking.

Make sure your appliance fits well

A peristomal hernia can change the fit of your ostomy appliance. If you're having pouch leakage or skin irritation, you may need to adjust the size of the opening on your appliance or wear a style that fits your belly shape better. You may need to see your ostomy nurse to have your ostomy supplies evaluated.

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