

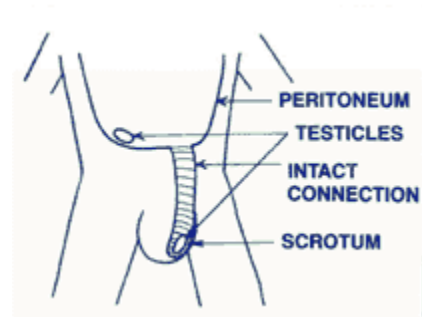
Hernias

What is a hydrocele (hernia)?

A hydrocele is a collection of fluid that is in the scrotum, surrounding the testicle. In children, a hydrocele is usually the same thing as a hernia.

Why does it occur?

The testicles initially develop in the abdomen. In most boys, they move down into the scrotum before birth. As they do this, some of the lining of the abdomen (called the peritoneum) comes down as a tube with the testicle. In most boys, the tube that forms the connection between the peritoneum and scrotum is closed at birth, but in some boys, it remains open. Fluid produced in the abdomen can then freely move into the scrotum and back (which accounts for changes in size often observed).



Can girls get a hernia?

Yes. In girls, the intact connection and swelling usually occurs in the labia (vaginal lips).

Is it serious?

Not usually. However, it is something that, if ignored, can become a problem in the future. Sometimes though, the intestine gets trapped in the connection and the intestine can kink. When this occurs, the child will be fussy or uncomfortable, may vomit, and have diarrhea or constipation. If these symptoms are due to a hernia, there may be a larger bulge than before and it may be firmer, redder or tender to touch. This is a situation that deserves immediate attention by your pediatrician or pediatric urologist. Fortunately, this situation seldom occurs.

How is this problem repaired?

This problem can be corrected with a small operation that is done as a day surgical procedure. A small incision is made in the groin so that the intact connection can be found and opened, the fluid drained, and then tied off to close the connection between the abdomen and scrotum. The intact connection may be present on the opposite side in up to 10% of children without showing any signs of it being there. We will often test to see if it is present at the time we repair the obvious side and if a problem is found on the opposite side, it can be repaired at the same time.

Should a hydrocele be fixed as soon as possible?

No, not necessarily. Most hydroceles are discovered in newborn babies. In fact, about 1 in 3 newborn boys has a small hydrocele. Fortunately, in the majority, the connection will close by one year of age. In premature boys, the number of hydroceles is even higher. If however the hydrocele is still present at 12 months of age, it likely will not go away by itself and should be surgically corrected. If there is a definitive hernia with bowel in it, repair during infancy should probably occur.