Hernias and hydroceles are common in children. A hernia is when an organ or piece of tissue squeezes through a hole or weak spot in the abdomen. A hydrocele is a collection of fluid around the testicles in boys. In this handout, you will learn about inguinal hernias and hydroceles and how doctors treat them. You will also learn how to prepare for your child's surgery and what to expect.

WHAT IS AN INGUINAL HERNIA?

An inguinal hernia is when intestine, fat or other tissue squeezes through an opening or weak spot in the abdomen (stomach area). Typically, muscle or other tissue hold the tissues or organs in place. The hernia causes a lump in the groin or scrotum. Inguinal hernias are very common in children, especially in boys. Hernias can be congenital (present at birth) or develop later in life.

WHAT IS A HYDROCELE?

Hydroceles are different from hernias, but they look similar. A hydrocele is a build-up of abdominal fluid in the tunica vaginalis (the sac that surrounds the testicles within the scrotum).

Most of the time, hydroceles go away on their own. Sometimes, fluid can travel between the scrotum and the abdomen through a small opening. This is called a communicating hydrocele. This happens when the tunica vaginalis does not close completely before birth. The size of the hydrocele can change, depending on how much fluid flows in and out of the scrotum.

WHY DOES MY CHILD NEED SURGERY?

Surgery closes the opening or weak spot in the abdomen and scrotum to prevent tissues or fluids from entering the scrotum. Your child will receive general anesthesia (sleeping medicine) to sleep comfortably and without pain during the surgery.

HOW CAN I HELP MY CHILD PREPARE FOR SURGERY?

Your child’s surgeon will tell you how to prepare for surgery. This includes instructions for eating and drinking before surgery.

You can also check out these resources from MGHfC:
- “Getting Ready for Surgery,” a video to help you prepare and know what to expect before surgery
  - www.massgeneralforchildren.org/getting-ready-for-surgery
- How to Help Your Child Prepare for Surgery handouts (by age)
  - Infant: https://goo.gl/GbCWjR
  - Toddler: https://goo.gl/MBFLX2
  - Preschooler: https://goo.gl/DMVFhr
  - School-aged: https://goo.gl/5u1EGx
  - Teen: https://goo.gl/CAVL5J

WHAT CAN I EXPECT AFTER SURGERY?

- In most cases, your child can go home 1-2 hours after surgery.
- Your child might have pain or swelling after surgery. The surgeon will tell you which pain medications are safe to take.
- Your child should wait 1-2 weeks before playing sports.
- Your child can go back to normal activities when he feels ready.