



Guide Dogs for the Blind

Umbilical Hernia Information Sheet

What is an umbilical hernia?

Shortly after a puppy is born the umbilical cord dries up, falls off, and the skin and abdominal wall close completely. Sometimes the skin over the umbilical area (the belly button) closes normally, but the abdominal wall does not close completely. This is called an umbilical hernia. In affected puppies a small amount of the fat from inside the abdomen frequently protrudes from the opening, creating a bump under the skin at the site of the belly button.

Some umbilical hernias are “reducible,” meaning the fat can gently be pushed back into the abdomen, but it will protrude again with normal activity.

Some umbilical hernias are “non-reducible,” meaning the bump under the skin cannot be pushed back into the abdomen. This commonly happens when the umbilical site closes but a small amount of fat is trapped outside the abdominal wall.

Do umbilical hernias cause any health problems?

- Small umbilical hernias do not cause any problems. These puppies do not need surgery and can do all normal activities.
- Large hernias can be a problem if an intestinal loop slips through the opening and becomes trapped or injured. GDB Veterinarians carefully evaluate each puppy with an umbilical hernia, and any hernia large enough to trap an intestinal loop is surgically repaired before the puppy is placed in a raiser home.

What should I watch for with an umbilical hernia?

When doing your routine body checks on the puppy, please also check the umbilical area. It is common for the bump to stay the same size or gradually become smaller over time. It is also common for a reducible umbilical hernia to become non-reducible. The bump should always be soft, non-painful, and have normal appearing skin over it.

It is very uncommon for the bump to become red, swollen, painful, or irritated. If you observe any of these symptoms or notice that the bump is increasing size, please have the area examined by a veterinarian.

What should I do if my local veterinarian recommends surgical repair?

Your local veterinarian might talk to you about the option for surgical repair. GDB Veterinarians typically do not recommend having a surgical repair done because small umbilical hernias are not a health risk.

Surgical repair would be appropriate in the following circumstances:

- If your local veterinarian determines the hernia is large enough for an intestinal loop to potentially be trapped. (In this case it is important to have your local veterinarian send records for a GDB Veterinarian to review prior to scheduling a surgery.)
- If your local veterinarian offers to repair the hernia when the dog is already under-going surgery for a spay or neuter. If the total estimate exceeds the GDB spay/neuter cost guidelines, please contact the Veterinary Financial Assistance Team for review of the estimate.