SYMPTOM

Groin lump

A groin lump is a swelling or bulge where the lower abdomen meets the thigh.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
A soft, firm, tender, or painless bump

WHERE IT IS FELT
The crease between the lower abdomen and thigh

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Hernia, swollen lymph nodes, skin cysts

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Painful firm lump, vomiting, or inability to pass stool

USUALLY LASTS
Days to months, based on infection, cyst, or hernia

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Lasting two weeks, growing, hard, or repeatedly painful

Overview

A groin lump is a swelling or bulge in the crease where your lower abdomen meets your upper thigh. It may be on one or both sides. Some lumps appear only when you stand, cough, strain, or lift something.

There are several possible causes. A hernia is common, but swollen lymph nodes, skin cysts, infections, and fatty lumps can look similar. Less often, a lump comes from a blood vessel or an abnormal growth.

The lump's location, texture, and response to movement can provide clues, but they cannot confirm the cause. Arrange an examination if the lump persists, changes, or concerns you.

What it may feel or look like

A groin lump may be small and pea-sized or form a more noticeable bulge. It can feel soft, rubbery, firm, or fluid-filled. The skin may look normal, red, or swollen.

Features that may help describe it include:

A hernia often becomes more obvious during coughing, lifting, or straining. It may flatten when

you lie down. A swollen lymph node usually feels like a smaller lump beneath the skin and may be tender during an infection.

Avoid repeatedly squeezing or pressing the lump. This may irritate the area and will not reliably identify the cause.

- Whether it appeared suddenly or gradually
- Whether it hurts, itches, or feels warm
- Whether it changes when you stand, cough, or lie down
- Whether it can gently move under the skin
- Whether there are similar lumps elsewhere
- Whether it is close to the scrotum or outer genital area

Common causes

A groin hernia happens when tissue pushes through a weak area in the abdominal wall. An inguinal hernia occurs in the groin canal and is more common in men. A femoral hernia appears slightly lower, near the top of the thigh, and is more common in women. A hernia may ache or feel heavy, especially after standing or lifting.

Swollen lymph nodes are another common cause. Lymph nodes are small parts of the immune system. Groin nodes can enlarge when your body is responding to an infection or inflammation in the leg, foot, genitals, or nearby skin. They often settle as the underlying problem improves.

A skin cyst is a closed sac containing fluid or thick material. It may be painless unless inflamed or infected. An infected hair follicle or abscess can cause a red, warm, painful lump and may release pus.

A lipoma is a non-cancerous fatty lump. It usually grows slowly, feels soft, and moves slightly beneath the skin.

Less common causes include enlarged veins, complications after groin surgery, and growths involving a lymph node or nearby tissue. A pulsing lump could be related to a blood vessel and should not be pressed.

When to seek medical care

Seek emergency care if the lump becomes suddenly very painful, firm, or cannot flatten when you lie down, particularly if you also have vomiting, abdominal swelling, or cannot pass stool or

gas. These symptoms can occur when part of the bowel is trapped in a hernia and its blood supply may be affected.

Sudden severe pain involving the groin and testicle, especially with swelling, nausea, or a testicle sitting higher than usual, also needs emergency assessment. This may be testicular torsion, in which the testicle twists and loses blood flow.

Get urgent same-day medical advice if:

Book a routine appointment if the lump lasts longer than about two weeks, keeps returning, or becomes larger, harder, or fixed in place. You should also arrange an assessment if swollen nodes occur with unexplained weight loss, drenching night sweats, or no clear infection.

- The lump is red, hot, rapidly enlarging, or leaking pus
- You have fever or feel significantly unwell
- Pain is increasing or limits normal movement
- The lump pulses, especially with pain, weakness, or faintness

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the lump appeared, whether it changes with coughing or standing, and whether you have pain, fever, bowel symptoms, skin problems, or a recent infection. They may ask about previous surgery and examine your legs, feet, abdomen, and genital area when relevant.

During the examination, you may be asked to stand, cough, or strain gently. This can make a hernia easier to detect. The clinician may check whether the lump is tender, mobile, warm, or connected to the skin.

Many groin lumps can be assessed through an examination alone. An ultrasound may be used if the cause is uncertain or to distinguish a hernia from a lymph node, cyst, or blood-vessel problem. Other imaging, blood tests, or a tissue sample may be considered when findings remain unexplained.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause and how much it affects you.

A hernia does not usually heal by itself. Some hernias can be monitored, while others are repaired with surgery because of symptoms or the risk of complications. The decision depends

on the hernia's type, location, and your overall health.

Swollen lymph nodes caused by a minor infection often shrink as the infection clears. Antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline help only when a bacterial infection requires them. An abscess may need drainage rather than antibiotics alone.

Cysts and lipomas may not need treatment unless they are painful, infected, growing, or difficult to identify. Do not squeeze or puncture a lump yourself.

While waiting for an appointment:

Do not use a hernia belt or truss unless a healthcare professional recommends and fits it. These devices do not repair the weakness.

- Avoid activities that clearly worsen pain or bulging
- Support the area when coughing if that feels more comfortable
- Use non-prescription pain relief only as directed on the label
- Note changes in size, pain, skin colour, and bowel symptoms

What to expect

A lump caused by an infection may improve over days or weeks. A reactive lymph node can remain noticeable for a while after other symptoms settle.

Cysts and lipomas may remain stable for months or years. A hernia often continues to appear during standing or straining and may gradually enlarge, although the pattern differs between people.

Follow-up may involve checking whether the lump is shrinking or changing. Seek another assessment sooner if pain increases, the skin becomes red, the lump turns firm or cannot flatten, or you develop vomiting or bowel symptoms.

Common questions

Can coughing or lifting cause a groin lump?

Coughing, lifting, and straining raise pressure inside the abdomen. They may make an existing hernia more noticeable. They are not the only reason a hernia develops.

Can a groin lump be a swollen lymph node?

Yes. Groin lymph nodes may swell because of a cut, rash, skin infection, sexually transmitted infection, or another problem affecting the lower body. Persistent or unexplained swelling

should be examined.

Should I try to push the lump back in?

Do not force it. A soft, painless hernia may flatten when you lie down, but forceful pressure can cause pain or injury. A painful or firm lump that will not flatten needs urgent assessment.

Does every groin hernia need immediate surgery?

No. Some can be monitored after medical assessment. Others need planned or emergency repair, depending on symptoms, hernia type, and whether tissue is trapped.

Sources

- National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. Inguinal Hernia .
- NHS. Hernia .
- NHS. Swollen glands .
- American College of Radiology. ACR Appropriateness Criteria: Hernia .
- Hammoud M, Gerken J. Inguinal Hernia . StatPearls Publishing, 2023.