

ADVANCED HERNIA REPAIR

WINTER 2011

A hernia occurs when part of an organ (typically fat or intestine) protrudes through a weak spot in the muscle wall that contains it. Hernias can occur in many parts of the body, but they develop most often in the groin, the belly button, at prior scars or in the upper stomach. They are ten times more likely to affect men than women.

It is estimated that 5 million Americans have hernias, but only 700,000 have them surgically repaired each year. Hernias don't heal on their own, so ignoring them isn't a good strategy.

"Hernias never go away, and they can become larger over time," says surgeon J.R. Salameh, MD, FACS of the Hernia Program at Virginia Hospital Center. "There's always a small but real risk of incarceration, meaning the hernia pops through the muscle wall and becomes stuck. This constitutes an emergency situation. If you suspect you may have a hernia, it's best to have it checked out and to fix it electively."

With the latest advances in medical technology, the likelihood of hernia recurrence has been significantly reduced. Whereas surgeons once relied on sutures to fix the muscle wall, they now install a super-strength mesh to repair and reinforce the weak spot. "With this tension-free approach, there is less pain and the likelihood of recurrence is about one percent for most patients; five percent for complicated cases," says Dr. Salameh, who has performed more than 1,000 hernia surgeries.

Unlike open surgery, which can take up to six weeks for recovery, those undergoing laparoscopic repair may resume normal activity within a few days.

And while open surgery was once the sole option, many patients are now candidates for laparoscopic repair, which is performed on an outpatient basis through three tiny keyhole incisions. This procedure takes less than an hour and patients can return home the same day. Unlike open surgery, which can take up to six weeks for recovery, those undergoing laparoscopic repair

may resume normal activity within a few days, and exercise such as golf and running a week later.

The Hernia Program at Virginia Hospital Center offers treatment for all types of hernias, including inguinal and femoral (groin), hiatal (stomach), umbilical (navel), and incisional hernias occurring at the site of previous surgeries. Roughly a third of all cases treated by the program's expert surgeons—Dr. Salameh and Dr. James Mayes—are difficult cases, such as exceptionally large or repeat hernias that have returned after previous repairs have failed. Patients may call the program directly, as physician referrals are not required. ■

To learn more about the Hernia Program, call 703.717.HERNIA (4376) or visit www.surgicalassociatesvhc.com.

AFTER HERNIA REPAIR, MARATHON RUNNER PICKS UP THE PACE

Arlington resident Will Ellison began training for his sixth marathon just two weeks after undergoing laparoscopic repair of a bilateral hernia in May 2010. "I'd had traditional open surgery to repair a hernia on one side back in 2000, but then it came back, along with a new hernia on the other side," says Ellison, 44, a competitive runner who has run the Boston Marathon twice, as well as marathons in Berlin, London and Paris. "I didn't want to go through another surgery and have it come back again so this time I did research online. I found a lot of reputable information about Dr. Salameh and how he teaches this procedure. Once I met with him and asked about his success rates, I had a high confidence level."

Following the laparoscopic procedure to repair both hernias, Ellison was back on his feet in no time. "The difference between my first and second surgeries was like night and day," he says. "When I had my open repair, I had a big incision and it was tough going for a week afterwards. With laparoscopic, it was unbelievable. I was up and walking the next day with only minimal discomfort and never needed prescription pain medication. I'd had aggravated pain for years caused by scar tissue from the first surgery and now there is no pain. My running is elevated to the next level. My goal now is to finish the next marathon in three hours flat." ■



Hernia repair surgery didn't slow down marathon runner Will Ellison.