

Hernia Examination

Essential Background

- Three hernias may be found in the hernia exam
 - Direct Inguinal
 - Indirect Inguinal
 - Femoral
- Of these, indirect inguinal hernias are the most common, particularly in younger patients
- Direct inguinal hernias occur due to a weakness in Hesselbach's triangle, an area bounded by the rectus sheath medially, the inferior epigastric vessels laterally, and the inguinal ligament inferiorly.
- Weakness here may occur over time with increasing age, and can also be related to pregnancy, chronic cough, chronic constipation/straining, and other causes of raised intra-abdominal pressure.

Preparation

- A chaperone should be present for a hernia examination.
- Ask patient about any pain or discomfort, and the character, onset and severity of this. A strangulated hernia is a medical emergency and must not be missed.

McCullough's Quick and Easy Hernia Exam

- Inspect both sides with patient standing, looking for masses, scars, etc.
- Examine the 'normal' side first, checking visual and palpable cough impulses
- Then examine the side with the lump, and try to reduce the mass by massaging it towards the deep inguinal ring. Can also ask the patient to reduce it.
- If not reducible while standing, ask the patient to lie down, and then try to reduce it again.
- Ask patient to lift head off the bed and back down (division of the rectus), then ask them to cough again.
- At this stage, auscultate the mass, check the landmarks of the inguinal ligament and then reduce the mass again.
- Press firmly above the mid point of the inguinal ligament to occlude the deep inguinal ring.
- Ask the patient to cough. A direct or femoral hernia should reappear, while an indirect hernia should not.

Further Points

- Once the patient is lying down, make a show of finding the pubic tubercle and ASIS to find the midpoint of the inguinal ligament, and check if the mass is above or below it.
- Following the initial inspection and cough impulse checks with the patient standing, ask the examiner if they would like you to perform a scrotal exam.
- If the mass doesn't reappear with pressure over the deep inguinal ring, keep hand in place and ask the patient to stand, then release. The mass may reappear if it is an indirect hernia.

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