

DOES INCISIONAL HERNIA REPAIR IMPROVE QUALITY OF LIFE?

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BACKGROUND: Incisional hernias are commonly managed with surgical repair, but the long-term effect of repair on health-related quality of life (HRQOL) is unclear. We investigated changes in HRQOL after incisional hernia repair.

METHODS: The Veteran's Affairs National Surgical Quality Improvement Program (VA NSQIP) identified patients who underwent incisional hernia repair (IHR) at 16 VA facilities between 2000 and 2002. The operative reports were abstracted to obtain repair details. HRQOL was assessed using the Short Form-36 (SF-36) questionnaire. Pre-operative SF-36 data were drawn from the 1999 Veteran's Health Survey, and post-operative data obtained from surveys mailed at a median of 62 months (range 51-68 months) after operation. Norm-based scores were derived for the eight SF-36 subscales and the summary Physical Component (PCS) and Mental Component (MCS) scores. Pre- to post-operative differences were calculated for each patient, and the significance of these differences was evaluated using signed rank tests.

RESULTS: Pre- and post-operative HRQOL data were available for 102 incisional hernia repair patients. Median age was 66 years, median BMI was 29, and 11% of patients had undergone previous IHR. Of all IHR, 93% utilized an open technique and 57% involved mesh placement. Three of eight SF-36 subscale scores demonstrated significant post-operative improvement (pre vs. post): role-physical (31 vs. 36, $p=0.0008$), bodily pain (38 vs. 44, $p=0.0002$), and role-emotional (34 vs. 40, $p=0.004$). The remaining subscale scores did not change significantly. Both mesh and suture repair were associated with significant improvements in bodily pain scores. The PCS remained unchanged (34 vs. 38, $p=0.56$), while the MCS improved from 39 to 44 ($p=0.0002$).

CONCLUSION: At five years of follow-up after IHR, significant increases were observed in HRQOL scores when compared with pre-operative values. These findings suggest that repair of incisional hernias results in durable improvements in HRQOL.