

# Gastroschisis

## What is it?

Gastroschisis is an opening in the abdominal wall (muscles and skin of the abdomen) that occurs during foetal development. The opening almost always occurs to the right of the umbilical cord. As a result, the stomach, small and large bowel develop outside the body and results in the abdominal wall failing to close.

## How often does gastroschisis occur?

Gastroschisis is seen in 1 in every 2,200 live births in England and Wales<sup>1</sup>. There is no difference in the number of boys or girls affected.

## What causes gastroschisis?

The cause of gastroschisis is unknown. It occurs early in foetal development. Rather than developing normally, the abdominal wall opens on the right side of the umbilicus. As a result, the bowel protrudes through the opening and outside the body of the foetus.

## How is gastroschisis treated?

Treatment will depend on the amount of bowel outside the abdomen. In a small or medium sized gastroschisis, complete repair can be done with one operation. This procedure returns the bowel into the abdominal cavity and closes the skin.

If the gastroschisis is large, or if your baby's condition is unstable, the repair may need to be done in several steps (staged). A silastic pouch (sterile pouch) is placed around the exposed intestines. The pouch will be tightened regularly to push the bowel back into the abdominal cavity. When the bowel is back in its proper place within the tummy, the pouch is removed and the opening is closed.

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#### Reference:

1. EUROCAT (the European Surveillance System for Congenital Anomalies) <http://www.eurocat-network.eu/> @ 31.08.2010. Period covered 2000 - 2008 inclusive.

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Sometimes babies with gastroschisis can have an intestinal atresia in which a part of the bowel does not develop properly. This may require formation of a temporary ileostomy (see separate sheet). One of the complications following closure of the defect can be an infection of the intestine called necrotizing enterocolitis (see separate sheet). This condition may also require formation of a temporary ileostomy.

*There is no difference in the number of boys or girls affected.*

