



APPENDECTOMY

What is appendicitis?

The appendix is a very small, narrow pouch attached to the intestine. Its purpose is not known. Food and stool can get trapped within this “pouch” and cause it to swell and become inflamed or infected. Occasionally other substances can obstruct this pouch and cause the same result. The appendix must be removed before it bursts or “perforates” and spreads the infection within the abdomen.

Who gets appendicitis?

Appendicitis can occur at any age but is most common in children between the ages of 4 and 15 years.

How is appendicitis diagnosed?

Children with appendicitis usually first complain of pain around their umbilicus (belly button) and do not want to eat. The pain gradually moves to the right lower part of the abdomen. There may be nausea, vomiting and a small amount of diarrhea. Some children have a fever but not always.

Your child’s doctor will begin by examining your child for other problems that can “look like” appendicitis. They will gently push on your child’s abdomen to find the spot that is the most tender. They may ask your child to move around or jump up and down. In some cases, it is necessary to do a rectal exam (put a gloved finger in the rectum).

After the exam, your doctor will have blood drawn to look for an increase in the number of white blood cells which may indicate an infection. It is often also helpful to get an ultrasound or CT scan to help make the diagnosis.

How is the decision made that surgery is needed?

If the physical exam, blood tests and scans all point to an infection in the appendix, your doctor will usually recommend an operation to remove the appendix. In some cases, if the appendix has already “burst” it may be better to put a thin drain tube into the abdomen to remove the infected fluid and give your child antibiotics to treat the infection before we remove the remaining appendix.

What can I expect from surgery?

Your child’s surgery will take about an hour. After surgery s/he will have intravenous (IV) fluids and medicines until s/he can take fluids by mouth. S/he may have a thin, clear tube draining fluid from the abdomen. In most cases s/he will have three very small incisions but there may be just one slightly longer incision.

Tips for the day of surgery—what to bring, what to leave home.

Bring your child's favorite comfort things; blankets, stuffed animal, small toys etc. Do not bring food, clothes, or large, heavy toys.

When will my child be able to go home?

Your child will be able to go home when they do not have a temperature over 101 F, are eating their regular diet and can take pain medicines by mouth. This is usually 1-2 days unless your child's appendix perforated in which case s/he will be in the hospital slightly longer.

What care is needed at home after surgery?

Bathing: Your child can take a shower 3-5 days after surgery and a bath in 7 days.

Activity: They should be out of bed and walking around but not riding a bike, playing sports or other contact activities.

Diet: Your child can eat any foods that are appropriate for age.

Medication: Most children need some pain medicine for a few days after coming home. Often acetaminophen (Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (Motrin®) is enough to control the pain and soreness.

When should I call the surgery team?

You should call the surgeon if your child has a temperature over 101 F, vomiting, diarrhea, increased or different abdominal pain or is not eating. You should also call if your child has an incision that looks redder, swollen, or begins to drain fluid.

What should I call my pediatrician for, and when should we see him/her?

You should call your child's pediatrician if s/he has a sore throat, runny nose, earache, cough or rash. If you are not sure whom to call, begin with your pediatrician. S/he may suggest you call the surgeon.

When can my child return to school or daycare? Will I need a note to excuse him/her from PE?

Children can usually return to school one week after going home. They should not participate in sports or physical education for 4 weeks. They should not lift anything over 10 pounds (including backpacks) for 4 weeks. Ask the surgery team for an excuse note for school.

What are the long term consequences?

There are no long term effects of having your appendix removed.

Will this affect growth and development?

Your child may lose a small amount of weight before s/he feels like eating her/his usual diet and amounts. S/he should return to her/his previous weight soon and have no other effects.

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