

# Appendicitis

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## KEY POINTS

- Appendicitis is swelling and irritation of the appendix. The appendix is a small, finger-shaped pouch where the large and small intestines join.
  - Appendicitis is usually treated with surgery to remove the appendix.
  - Ask your provider how to take care of yourself at home, what symptoms or problems you should watch for, and what to do if you have them.
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## What is appendicitis?

Appendicitis is swelling and irritation of the appendix. The appendix is a small, finger-shaped pouch where the large and small intestines join. Healthcare providers are not sure what the appendix does, but when it is inflamed, it gets swollen and painful and can cause serious problems.

It is important to get treatment for appendicitis before the appendix ruptures. A rupture is a break or tear in the appendix. If an infected appendix breaks open, it can cause a life-threatening infection of the belly.

Because of the risk of rupture, appendicitis is considered an emergency.

## What is the cause?

In most cases, appendicitis is caused by a blockage of the opening of the appendix by a piece of bowel movement. Sometimes it is caused by infection in the digestive tract.

## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms can differ from person to person. They may include:

- Pain, usually starting near the bellybutton, then moving to the right lower side of the belly. The pain starts suddenly and worsens quickly, especially when you are moving around.
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Trouble passing gas
- Fever, usually not very high
- Swollen, tight, or hard belly

Children under 10 and adults over 50, as well as pregnant women, are less likely to have the usual symptoms of appendicitis. Because of this, they may not get treatment right away, which makes it more likely that the appendix will rupture. They should

be especially careful to report symptoms that could be early signs of appendicitis. Appendicitis is most common between the ages of 10 and 30. If you think you may have appendicitis and are about to see your healthcare provider, do not eat or drink anything before the appointment.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and medical history and examine you. You may have the following tests:

- Blood tests
- Urine tests
- An ultrasound, which uses sound waves to show pictures of the belly
- MRI, which uses a strong magnetic field and radio waves to show detailed pictures of the belly
- CT scan, which uses X-rays and a computer to show detailed pictures of the belly
- Exploratory laparotomy: A surgeon will make small cuts in the belly to see if the appendix looks inflamed and should be removed. This is done sometimes after other tests do not give definite results for what is causing the symptoms.

If the diagnosis is not clear, you may be watched closely in the emergency room or hospital for 12 to 24 hours to see if surgery is needed.

If your provider does not keep you in the hospital and sends you home without surgery, your provider will probably ask you to:

- Not use any pain medicine. Taking pain medicine could make it hard for you to know if the pain gets better or worse.
- Not use any enemas or laxatives. These medicines increase the risk that the appendix will rupture if it is inflamed.
- Not take any antibiotic medicines.
- Take and write down your temperature every 2 to 4 hours.
- Contact your provider if any of your symptoms get worse over the next few hours.

## **How is it treated?**

Appendicitis is usually treated with surgery to remove the appendix. It is important to have surgery quickly before the appendix ruptures. People can live a normal life without an appendix.

You will be given general anesthesia to keep you from feeling pain during the procedure. General anesthesia relaxes your muscles and puts you into a deep sleep.

You may have either one cut in the lower right area of the belly or 1 to 3 small cuts if your healthcare provider uses a laparoscope, which is a lighted tube with a camera. If your appendix is removed before it ruptures, you will usually feel much better in a couple of days.

If the appendix has ruptured, infection can spread through your belly, which is dangerous. Your healthcare provider may put a drainage tube in your belly to help

the infection drain. You will stay in the hospital after surgery to receive IV antibiotic medicine and pain medicine and may need more than 1 surgery.

Treatment without surgery includes taking antibiotic medicine to treat the infection. This treatment may be used if you are not well enough for surgery or surgery is not available. Without treatment, appendicitis can be fatal. Close follow-up is important to make sure the infection is getting better and to decide if or when surgery is needed.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

Follow the full course of treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider. If antibiotic medicine has been prescribed, take all of it according to your provider's instructions.

Ask your provider:

- How and when you will get your test results
- How long it will take to recover
- If there are activities you should avoid and when you can return to normal activities
- How to take care of yourself at home
- What symptoms or problems you should watch for and what to do if you have them

Make sure you know when you should come back for a checkup. Keep all appointments for provider visits or tests.

*This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.*

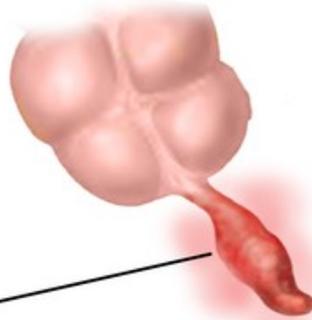
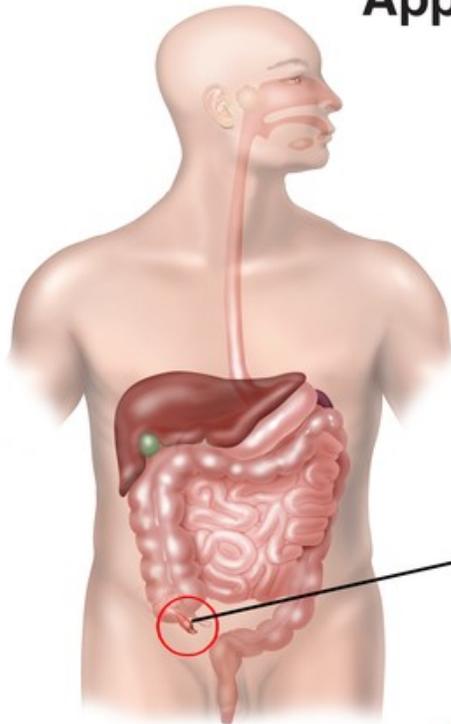
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Published by Change Healthcare.

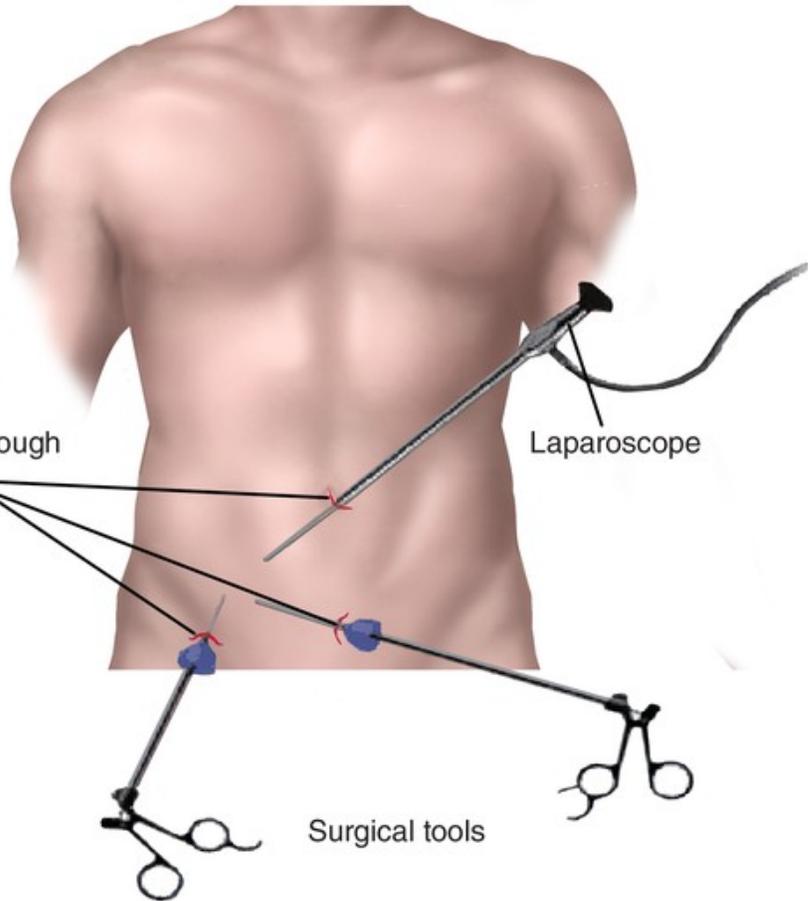
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# Appendectomy

Appendectomy is surgery to remove a swollen or infected appendix.



Laparoscopic surgery is done through several small cuts in the belly.

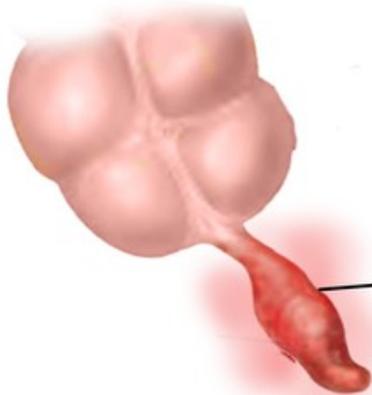


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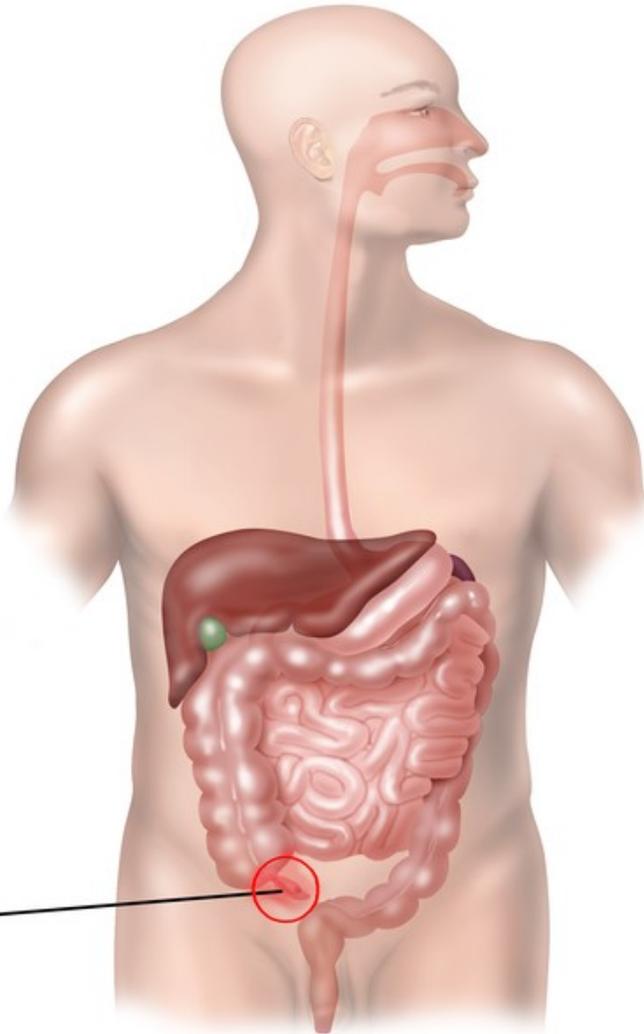
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Normal appendix



Inflamed appendix



The appendix is a small, finger-shaped pouch where the large and small intestines join.