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# Appendicitis

*This leaflet tells you about the condition known as appendicitis. It explains what is involved in treating it and the common complications associated with this condition. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your doctor, but as a guide to be used in connection to what is discussed with your doctor.*



## **What is Appendicitis?**

Appendicitis is inflammation of the appendix. The appendix is a small tube attached to the beginning of the colon on the lower right side of the abdomen. The pain usually begins near the navel (belly button) and moves down and to the right. Within 24 hours the pain intensifies and settles in the lower right part of the abdomen. Movement makes the pain worse. Many people lose their appetite, and vomit. A raised temperature (fever) is quite common, usually in the range 38 °C.

Appendicitis is most common in children and young adults, but can occur at any age. There is no known specific cause of appendicitis. It may occur after a viral infection in the digestive tract, or when the opening connecting the large intestine and the appendix is blocked.

## **Why does it need treating?**

The appendix can become inflamed and if left untreated it can burst, causing severe infection and even death.

## **What is the treatment?**

Early, mild appendicitis may sometimes be cured with antibiotics. More serious cases are treated with surgery to remove the appendix, called an appendicectomy.

## **What is an appendicectomy?**

An appendicectomy is an operation to diagnose and treat acute appendicitis.

## **What happens before my operation?**

At the hospital, we will ask you to have a wash and change into a surgical gown. We will give you, some compression stockings to wear to reduce the chance of blood clots in your legs. We may also give you a small blood-thinning injection. The anaesthetist will check your general health and explain more about your general anaesthetic (which puts you to sleep during your surgery).

### Having an anaesthetic:

You will need to have an empty stomach before the surgery. You will also see your surgeon, to explain more about the surgery, and answer any questions you may have. You will be asked to sign a consent form to show that you agree to have the operation. You can be given a copy of this, for your own records.

## **How is an appendicectomy performed?**

Depending on your condition, the operation can be done laparoscopic (through small cuts – also called 'keyhole surgery') or as an open procedure. Both are done under general anaesthetic. In an open procedure,



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we will make a cut in the lower right hand side of your tummy, where we can locate and remove your appendix. Occasionally you may have a small drain tube left in for a few days after your surgery.

### **What are the alternatives to this procedure?**

Antibiotics may sometimes treat appendicitis but is not standard treatment. It is difficult to be completely certain that someone has appendicitis without a CT scan. Alternatives may include repeated assessments and waiting to see what happens, or antibiotics. Appendicitis treated with antibiotics is likely to have another attack of appendicitis within a year, and need further hospital treatment (including surgery).

### **What happens after the operation?**

You will go into the recovery area to be monitored as you wake up from the anaesthetic. Once you are recovered, we will take you back to the ward. We will monitor your blood pressure, pulse and temperature. You can start to drink after the operation, and eat as per instructions. You will be able to get out of bed a few hours after your surgery, and the nursing staff will help you as required. You may feel drowsy for a day or so as the anaesthetic wears off, so you should take it easy and not make any important decisions, sign any legal documents or operate machinery for at least 24 hours after your operation.

### **Will it be painful?**

It is normal to have some pain in your tummy and around the wound for several days after your surgery. This can be managed with regular painkillers. Your tummy may feel bloated afterwards, but this will settle in time. If you have had a keyhole procedure, you may experience some pain in your shoulder. This is due to the gas inserted along with the instruments, which gets absorbed into the body. Walking around can help this to improve.

You may also notice that you have a sore throat afterwards. This is due to the breathing tube placed in your throat for the general anaesthetic. This pain will go in a day or two.

### **When can I go home?**

You can go home once you:

- feel ready
- can eat and drink without feeling sick
- have no signs of infection
- have had your wound checked to make sure it is OK
- can get out of bed and move around
- can manage your pain at home with tablets.

Typically, this will be on the day of the surgery or the day after, unless the appendicitis has been severe.



### **How do I look after my wound?**

Usually, you will have skin glue on top of your wounds and you can have a shower from the next day. If dressings have been used for your wound, they are splash-proof, and you can carefully wash or shower, but remove the dressings if they become soaked. Normal healing may involve tingling, numbness and itching of the wound, and a hard lumpy feeling as the new scar tissues form. Stitches in the skin are usually dissolvable, meaning they do not need to be removed.

### **When will my bowels return to normal?**

You may find that you have either constipation or diarrhoea after your operation; this is very common. It may take some time for your bowels to return to normal, but if you are concerned, please inform us. Remember to drink plenty of fluids so that you do not become dehydrated.

### **When can I return to work?**

You can return to work and normal activities as soon as you feel able to. This will depend on your type of surgery you have had and the type of work that you do (physical work or non-physical work). We generally recommend that you take a couple of weeks off, but you may wish to go back to work sooner if you are in a non-physical job. If your job involves heavy lifting or manual handling, we recommend that you take at least four weeks off. Please discuss this with us further.

### **What should I do if I have any problems?**

Please inform us directly if you:

- experience leakage, redness, increased pain, or other problems with the wounds
- feel unwell and feverish
- have pain in your calves or are short of breath
- experience prolonged vomiting