



# Appendicitis

## ***What is Appendicitis?***

The appendix is a small pouch that hangs from the large intestine at the juncture of the small and large intestine. If the appendix becomes blocked and swollen, bacteria can grow in the pouch. The cause of infection can be from an illness, thick mucus or hard stool trapped in the opening of the appendix.

Appendicitis is an infection of the appendix. The infection and swelling can decrease the blood supply to the wall of the appendix, leading to tissue death. The appendix can rupture or burst causing bacteria and stool to release into the abdomen. A ruptured appendix can lead to peritonitis which is an infection of your entire abdomen.

## ***Who is at greatest risk for developing Appendicitis?***

Appendicitis affects 1 in 1,000 people, most often between the ages of 10 and 30 years old. It is a common reason for an operation in children, and it is the most common surgical emergency in pregnancy.

## ***What are the symptoms of Appendicitis?***

Appendicitis pain can be different for each person because the appendix can touch different organs. This can be confusing and make it difficult to diagnose appendicitis. Most often, pain starts around the navel and then moves to the right lower abdomen over 24 hours. In the classic description, abdominal pain is accompanied by nausea, vomiting, lack of appetite and fever. The pain is often worse with walking or talking. During pregnancy, the appendix sits higher in the abdomen so the pain may seem to come from the upper abdomen. In the elderly, symptoms are often not as noticeable because less swelling occurs.

## ***What tests will I need?***

Appendicitis is diagnosed by the classic symptoms and the doctor's physical examination. If your physician suspects that you may have appendicitis, he/she may recommend one or more of the following tests:

- Abdominal Ultrasound
- Computed Tomography (CT)
- Complete Blood Count (CBC)
- Rectal Exam
- Pelvic Exam
- Urinalysis

## ***What procedures will my general surgeon recommend?***

Most commonly, acute appendicitis is found in the emergency department with surgery being the usual treatment.

### *Laparoscopic Appendectomy*

A general surgeon may recommend that you have a surgical procedure called a laparoscopic appendectomy. This technique is the most common for simple appendicitis. The surgeon will make 3 to 4 small incisions in the abdomen. A port is inserted into one of the incisions for carbon dioxide gas to inflate the abdomen and a laparoscope (fiber optic camera) is introduced through another incision allowing the surgeon to see the anatomy and access the appendix. Surgical instruments are placed in the other small incision to remove the appendix. The sites are closed with sutures or staples and steri-strips. The method is minimally invasive and generally requires less recovery time.

### *Open Appendectomy*

A general surgeon may start with a laparoscopic technique and need to change to an open appendectomy for safety reasons. The surgeon makes an incision about 2 to 4 inches long in the lower right side of the abdomen and cuts through fat and muscle layers to the appendix. The appendix is then removed from the intestine. The site is closed with sutures or staples and steri-strips.