

Appendicitis

What Is Appendicitis?

Your side may hurt so much that you called your doctor. Or maybe you went straight to the hospital emergency room. If the symptoms came on quickly, you may have **appendicitis**. This is an infection of the appendix. Surgery can stop the infection. Read on to learn more about what to expect.

Pain and Other Symptoms

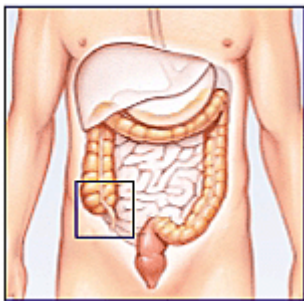
Appendicitis can happen to anyone. Symptoms tend to appear quickly, often over a day or two. Symptoms can include:

- Pain that starts in the center of your belly
- and moves to your lower right side
- Increased pain and pressure on your side when you walk
- Vomiting, nausea, or decreased appetite
- Fever or fatigue
- Diarrhea or constipation

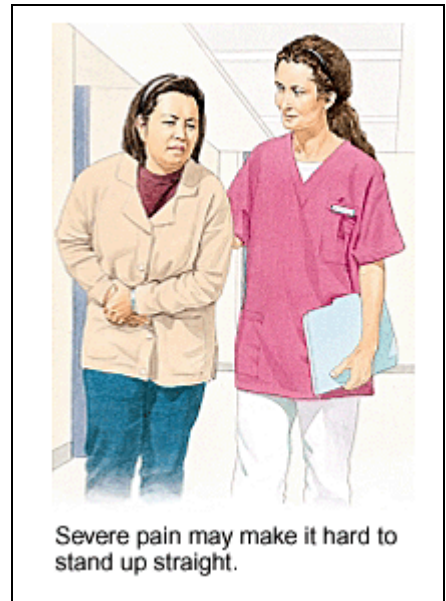
How Surgery Helps

Medication can't cure appendicitis. But an **appendectomy** (surgery to remove an infected appendix) can. This is a very common procedure. Removing the appendix should not affect your long-term health. It's best to remove the appendix before it bursts. If an infected or burst appendix is not removed, it can cause severe health problems

Your Appendix

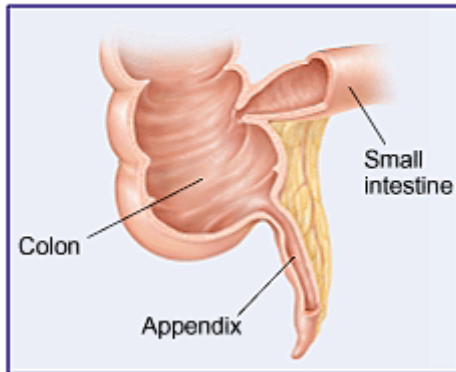


The appendix is a hollow structure about the size of your little finger. It opens off the **colon** (large bowel). The purpose of the appendix is unclear. But if it is blocked, it may become infected.



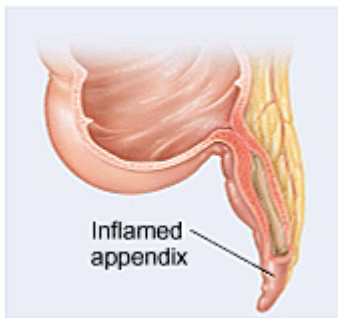
Severe pain may make it hard to stand up straight.

A Normal Appendix



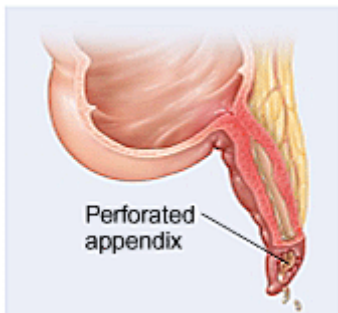
The small intestine brings liquid waste to the colon and appendix. This waste can easily pass in and out of a normal appendix.

An Inflamed Appendix



An appendix may become **inflamed** (swollen) or blocked by a hard piece of stool. Then liquid waste cannot pass in and out of the appendix. As a result, the appendix may become infected

A Perforated Appendix

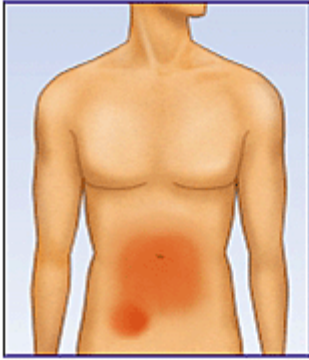


An infected appendix may **perforate** (burst) and leak infected material. This may cause further infection (an abscess or peritonitis) in your abdomen (belly).

Your Medical Evaluation

Severe belly pain that settles in your right side is often a sign of appendicitis. But to be certain of the diagnosis, your doctor will do a physical exam. Tests may also be ordered. In some cases, you may be sent home and asked to return the next day.

Where Does It Hurt?



Pain may move from the center of your abdomen to your lower right side.

Your doctor will ask about your symptoms. The center of your abdomen may be painful. Or the pain may have moved to your lower right side. To help locate the cause of pain, your doctor may:

- Feel your abdomen, and move your right leg
- Perform a rectal or pelvic exam

Order a blood test, urine test, x-ray, ultrasound, CT scan, or barium enema

You May Be Sent Home

The cause of your illness may be unclear even after an exam. You may be sent home and asked to return the next day. Your symptoms may then be easier to diagnose. If you are sent home, ask what to eat or drink while you wait. Avoid antibiotics and pain medications. Be sure to follow-up in 24 hours.

When to go to the Emergency Room

Call or go to the emergency room right away if:

- Your temperature keeps rising
- Pain or tenderness worsens
- Your overall condition worsens

If You Have Surgery

After your evaluation, your doctor may decide that you have appendicitis. If so, surgery is needed. You will be sent to a hospital room. Or you may be taken right to an operating room. There you will be prepared for surgery. The goal of surgery is to remove the appendix safely. In most cases, the surgery lasts from 30 minutes to an hour. If your appendix has burst, surgery may take longer.