

# Appendectomy

## Definition

An appendectomy is surgery to remove the appendix.

## Alternative Names

Appendix removal

## Description

The appendix is a small, finger-shaped organ that branches off from the first part of the large intestine. The appendix is removed when it becomes swollen (inflamed) or infected. This condition is called appendicitis. An appendix that has a hole in it (perforated) can leak and infect the entire abdomen area. This can be life-threatening.

Appendectomy is done using either:

- Spinal anesthesia: Medicine is put into your back to make you numb below your waist. You will also get medicine to make you sleepy.
- General anesthesia: You will be asleep and not feel any pain during the surgery.

The surgeon makes a small cut in the lower right side of your belly area and removes the appendix.

The appendix can also be removed using small surgical cuts and a camera. This is called a laparoscopic appendectomy.

If the appendix broke open or a pocket of infection (abscess) formed, your abdomen will be washed out during surgery. A small tube may be left in the belly area to help drain out fluids or pus.

## Why the Procedure Is Performed

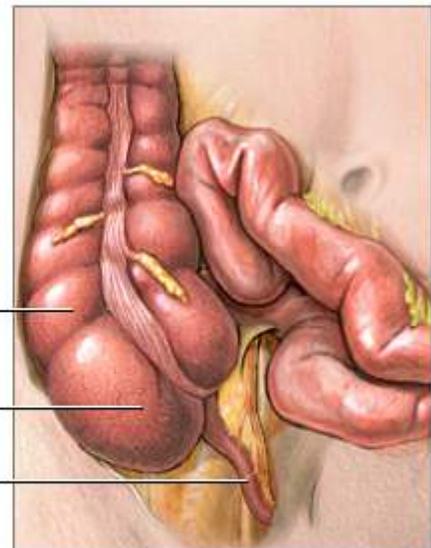
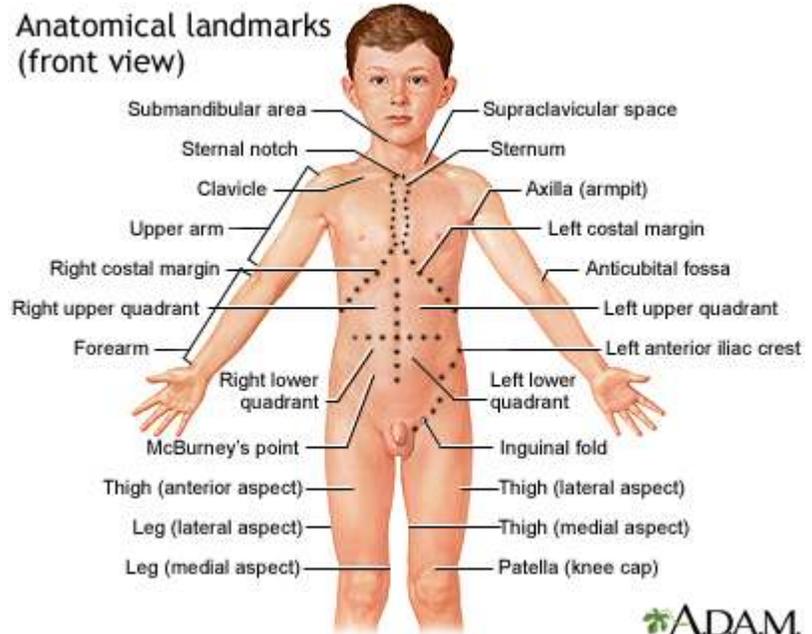
An appendectomy is done for appendicitis. The condition can be hard to diagnose, especially in children, older people, and women of childbearing age.

Most often, the first symptom is pain around your belly button:

- The pain may be mild at first, but it becomes sharp and severe.
- The pain often moves into your right lower abdomen and becomes more focused in this area.

Other symptoms include:

## Anatomical landmarks (front view)



- Diarrhea or constipation
- Fever (usually not very high)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Reduced appetite

If you have symptoms of appendicitis, seek medical help right away. Do not use heating pads, enemas, laxatives, or other home treatments to try to relieve symptoms.

Your health care provider will examine your abdomen and rectum. Other tests may be done:

- Blood tests, including a white blood cell count (WBC), may be done to check for infection.
- When the diagnosis is not clear, the doctor may order a CT scan or ultrasound to make sure the appendix is the cause of the problem.

There are no actual tests to confirm that you have appendicitis. Other illnesses can cause the same or similar symptoms.

The goal is to remove an infected appendix before it breaks open (ruptures). After reviewing your symptoms and the results of the physical exam and medical tests, your surgeon will decide whether you need surgery.

Even when the surgeon finds that the appendix is not infected, it will be removed to prevent future problems.

## Risks

Risks of anesthesia include the following:

- Reactions to medications
- Problems breathing

Risks of surgery include:

- Bleeding
- Infection

Other risks of an appendectomy after a ruptured appendix include:

- Buildup of pus, which may need draining and antibiotics
- Longer hospital stays
- Side effects from medications

## After the Procedure

Patients tend to recover quickly after a simple appendectomy. Most patients leave the hospital in 1 to 2 days after surgery. You can go back to your normal activities within 2 to 4 weeks after leaving the hospital.

Patients who have the appendix removed through small surgical cuts tend to recover and get back to their daily activities faster.

Recovery is slower and more complicated if the appendix has broken open or an abscess has formed.

Living without an appendix causes no known health problems.

## References

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## Notes:

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