

Appendectomy

(a-pen-DECK-ta-me)

What is an appendectomy?

An appendectomy is surgery to remove the appendix. The appendix is a small, hollow sack that hangs down from the large intestine (bowel). It has no known purpose in the body.

If the appendix becomes blocked, it can become inflamed or infected. This is called appendicitis. If the appendicitis is severe, the appendix may burst open (rupture) and cause a serious infection in the abdomen.

If your child has appendicitis, he or she may need to have surgery to remove the appendix. Your child's doctor will help you learn about this surgery and answer your questions.

What happens before surgery?

Before surgery, your child will not be allowed to eat or drink. An intravenous will be started to give your child fluids, pain medication and antibiotics. Your child may need to have a blood test, if this has not already been done. The surgeon may request other tests, such as x-rays or an ultrasound of your child's abdomen.

If surgery can be done right away, your child may go directly from the emergency department to the operating room. If your child must wait for surgery, your child may be transferred to the children's ward. A nurse and/or Child Life Specialist will help you and your child get ready for surgery. During this time, you can stay with your child and the nurses will continue to monitor your child closely. When the operating room is ready, you may go with your child to the receiving area. The operating room nurses will greet you and take over the care of your child.

What happens during surgery?

Your child will be given a general anesthetic so that he or she will be asleep during the surgery and not feel any pain.

If the appendix has not ruptured, it may be removed using laparoscopic surgery. With this type of surgery, 3 small incisions are made in the abdomen. Thin instruments, including one with a camera are used to remove the appendix.

If the appendix has ruptured, a larger incision may be needed. This is called an open appendectomy. Your child may also need a nasogastric tube (NG tube). This tube is put into his or her nose and passed down to the stomach. The NG tube keeps the stomach empty.

What happens right after surgery?

Your child will go to the Post Anesthetic Care Unit (PACU) after surgery. In the PACU, your child will be closely monitored until he or she is fully awake. As soon as possible, the nurse will bring you to the PACU to be with your child.

When your child is ready, he or she will be moved to the children's ward. The ward nurses will continue your child's recovery care.

How can I help my child feel more comfortable?

After surgery, the amount and type of pain is different for each child.

In the hospital, several medications are readily available to help your child feel more comfortable. Please let the nurse know if you think your child is in pain.

You can help distract your child from the pain with activities such as:

- massage
- reading to or with your child
- listening to music
- playing board or video games

When your child is laying in bed, place a pillow under his or her knees to reduce pulling on the tummy.

For more information, please read the parent information sheet "Relieving your child's pain". Your nurse can give you a copy, or view online at www.hhsc.ca/PEDL

Your surgeon may give you a prescription for pain medication to give you child at home. Give the medication as directed by the doctor. If you do not have a prescription, you may give your child acetaminophen (Tylenol). Follow the directions on the package for your child's age and weight.

Your child may have gas pains, which he or she may feel in the shoulder area or the tummy. Walking around the ward can help move the gas and relieve the pain. Encourage your child to walk about, after he or she has had some pain medication. Have your child try to walk tall, not bent over. Your child may want to hold your arm or shoulder as he or she is walking.

What can my child eat or drink?

Your child will be started on clear fluids after surgery. Your child will return to his or her usual diet gradually, depending on the severity of the appendicitis and how your child feels.

If your child has an NG tube, he or she will not be allowed to eat or drink until there is only a small amount of drainage from the tube. Then the nurse will start giving your child sips of ice chips and/or clear fluids. After the NG tube is removed and your child tolerates clear fluids, your child can gradually return to his or her usual diet.

How do I take care of the incision(s)?

There are small white tapes called Steristrips across each incision. The nurse will check the dressing(s) and change them if necessary. If the tapes have not fallen off by 7 days, gently soak and remove them. Keep the incision(s) clean and dry. You may give your child a sponge bath for the first 5 days, then he or she may have a full bath. Use mild soap and no bubble bath. Pat the incision(s) dry after the bath.

When can my child go home?

The hospital stay after surgery depends on the severity of the appendicitis. Some children are well enough to go home in 1 to 2 days. Some children may need to stay in hospital for 7 to 10 days to receive intravenous antibiotics.

What activity can my child do?

Your child can resume usual activities when he or she feels able. Your child should avoid vigorous activities such as sports, heavy lifting or bike riding for:

- 2 weeks after laparoscopic surgery (3 small incisions)
- 3 weeks after an open appendectomy (1 incision)

Before you go home, make sure your child has a follow-up appointment with the surgeon 1 to 2 weeks after surgery.

When should I call the surgeon?

Call the surgeon right away if you notice your child has any of these problems:

- your child feels ill or has a fever; a temperature higher than 38.5°C (101.3°F)
- redness, swelling, active or persistent bleeding or drainage (discharge) from an incision
- an open incision
- pain that does not go away or seems to be getting worse
- unable to eat or drink as usual, nausea or vomiting
- fewer wet diapers, or trouble passing urine

Call the McMaster Children's Hospital **905-521-2100** and ask for the surgeon's office. After hours or on weekends, call **905-521-5030** and ask for the Pediatric Surgeon on-call.

If you cannot reach the surgeon, bring your child to the Emergency Department at the McMaster Children's Hospital. If you are not in the Hamilton area, go to the nearest emergency room.

For questions that are not urgent, please call your family doctor or pediatrician.