

Appendectomy

The appendix is a small, worm-like pouch of tissue that extends from the first part of the large bowel. During an appendectomy, the appendix is removed. An infected appendix must be taken out because if it leaks into the abdomen, it can be fatal.

If an abscess has formed or the appendix has ruptured, the abdomen will be “washed out” during surgery. This is done to prevent the infection from spreading. A small tube may be left in to help drain fluid.

You should heal quickly. If the appendix has an abscess or has ruptured, your healing may be slower and more complex. In this case, you will need medicine to treat the infection.

Living without an appendix causes no known health problems.

Incision Care

If your doctor uses a laparoscope to remove the appendix, you may have 3-5 small incisions. Expect the incisions to be swollen and numb and heal in about 2 weeks.

- Keep incisions dry and covered for 48 hours (2 days) after surgery. Then, you may shower and wash them with mild soap (or approved antimicrobial soap) and water and pat dry. **Do not** soak them in the bathtub, hot tub, or swim until they are healed. This may take at least 2 weeks.
- **Do not** use ointments, powders, or creams on the incisions.
- You do not have to wear a dressing unless wounds are in a skin fold, your clothes rub on them, or they are draining.

- If you wear a dressing, change it at least once a day and more often if it gets wet.

Look at your wounds each day for:

- Signs of infection.
- Increasing redness or warmth.
- Pus-like drainage.
- Excess swelling or bleeding.
- Fever (by mouth) above 100.4° F for two readings, taken 4 hours apart.

Activity

- We will have you up and walking the day after surgery. Make sure you walk at least 3 times each day at home.
- Nothing more than walking until okayed by your doctor.
- **Do not** drive while taking opioid pain pills.
- **Do not** lift more than 10 pounds for 4–6 weeks.
- Check with your doctor before going back to work.
- You may resume sex when you feel ready.
- Avoid all tobacco. This includes secondhand smoke.

Pain Control

It is normal to have some pain. You may be taking opioid pain medicine to help improve your comfort. Opioids are a stronger pain medicine than what you can buy over the counter at the store. You should only take them when you are in moderate to severe pain. Most people will only need to take a non-opioid pain medicine such as acetaminophen (Tylenol®).

You may have aching in your neck and shoulders from the gas put into your abdomen. Using a heating pad to this area and/or walking may help relieve this pain better than medicine.

Diet

You should be able to eat a regular diet soon after surgery. You may want to start with foods that are easy to digest (cream of wheat, cream soups, milk, yogurt, etc.) and advance your diet as you can. If you start to feel nauseous, go back to liquids until you feel well enough to eat solid food again. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids.

Prevent Constipation

A diet high in fluid and fiber can help prevent constipation. Be sure to drink 6-8 glasses of liquids each day. You may want to use a stool softener, **docusate sodium** (Colace[®]) and/or a bulk fiber laxative as long as you are taking pain pills and until you have your first bowel movement.

When to Call

- Nausea or vomiting for more than 24 hours.
- Signs of infection.
- Increasing redness or warmth.
- Pus-like drainage.
- Excess swelling or bleeding.
- Fever (by mouth) above 100.4° F for two readings taken 4 hours apart.
- Chills.
- Pain not controlled by pain pills.
- Excess bruising.
- If you have not had a bowel movement in 2-3 days, you may need a laxative.

Who to Call

Surgery Clinic
(608) 263-7502

This is a 24-hour number.

After hours, weekends and holidays, please ask for the doctor on call for

Dr. _____.

Leave your name and phone number with the area code. The doctor will call you back.

Toll Free: **1-800-323-8942**.

In an emergency, dial **911**.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 12/2023 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5292