About Your Appendectomy (Removal of the Appendix)

What is the appendix?
The appendix is a 3- to 6-inch long tube-like structure at the connection of the small and large intestines. No one knows if the appendix has a function. However, an infected or inflamed appendix must be removed to prevent rupturing.

The exact location of the appendix may be different from person to person, so symptoms of appendicitis (inflammation of the appendix) can vary.

What is appendicitis?
Fecal matter (stool) or some other cause can lead to an inflammation of the appendix. Appendicitis usually develops rapidly with little warning over 6 to 12 hours. The usual symptom is abdominal pain that begins as vague discomfort around the navel. Over the next several hours, the pain becomes much more severe and is usually localized to the lower right side of the abdomen. The abdomen may become rigid and very sensitive to pressure. Nausea, vomiting and a slight fever often are present.

Who gets appendicitis?
Any person, at any age, can have appendicitis. About two-thirds of all people who get appendicitis are women, and are 15 to 44 years old.

How is appendicitis diagnosed?
The diagnosis of appendicitis is usually made as quickly as possible to avoid a ruptured appendix. Often the doctor will base the diagnosis on your symptoms and a physical examination. Blood and urine tests, and sometimes a CT scan, are done if there is a question about the cause of your pain. An inflamed appendix may rupture. A ruptured appendix may spread inflammation and infection to other areas of the abdomen. Therefore, an appendectomy is almost always performed as emergency surgery.

The surgical procedure
Your surgeon can perform an appendectomy in two ways:
• An open operation, in which the surgeon makes a surgical incision (opening) and removes the appendix directly.
• Using a laparoscope (camera device) inserted through the abdomen wall. The surgeon removes the appendix with special equipment, while watching what he is doing on a TV screen.

Your doctor will decide which method is the best for you.
What about complications?
Complications are rare after an appendectomy. If the appendix ruptures before surgery, *peritonitis*, a potentially life-threatening infection of the abdominal cavity, may occur. Treatment of a ruptured appendix includes intravenous (IV) antibiotics to control the infection. To avoid the risk of peritonitis from a ruptured appendix, some patients with symptoms of appendicitis may have surgery, but later find the appendix was normal. In these cases, the surgeon usually removes the appendix anyway to prevent future problems. There is always a risk of complications with anesthesia and surgery. Talk with your doctor about possible risks of surgery.

Follow these instructions as you recover at home:

**Activity**
- You may feel sleepy for the first 24 hours because of the sedation you received.
- Resume normal activities slowly.
- No heavy work until your surgeon tells you it is okay.
- Do not drive a motor vehicle, operate any heavy equipment or sign any legal documents for 24 hours after surgery.

**Medications**
- You should expect mild pain after this surgery. You will be given medicine for your pain.
- Use the pain pills as told by your surgeon, as long as needed. If taking this medication as prescribed does not help your pain, call your surgeon.
- Increase fruit, fiber and fluids in your diet to prevent constipation.

**Diet**
Start with easy-to-digest foods and increase to your normal diet as you recover. Easy-to-digest foods are clear liquids plus hot cereal, white toast, crackers, sherbet, broth-type soups and small amounts of milk products. Next, begin to eat small portions of your normal foods. Limit seeds, nuts, spicy foods, pepper, fried foods, raw fruits, raw and gassy vegetables, and rich desserts.

**Bathing**
You may shower after 24 hours.

**Wound care**
- Apply ice to the incision for 20 minutes, then remove for 20 minutes for the first 24 hours.
- Keep steri-strips (tapes over incision) in place. They will gradually fall off on their own. You may trim long ends if they bother you.
- If a bandage is over the incision, you may take it off after 24 to 48 hours.

**Call your surgeon at the office if you have:**
- Fever over 101.4°F
- Signs of infection such as excessive swelling, redness or foul drainage
- Serious concerns about your recovery
- Pain that is not controlled by your pain medication

**Special instructions if you had laparoscopic surgery**
You may have a sore navel (belly button) from the incision itself or from bruising. You may also feel shoulder pain due to the irritation from the carbon dioxide gas placed in the abdomen. To relieve shoulder pain, lie down with hips higher than your shoulders. A bloated or puffy feeling from the gas may take 10 days to go away.