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Overview

Appendicitis

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Appendicitis is a painful swelling of the appendix. The appendix is a small, thin pouch about 5 to 10cm (2 to 4 inches) long. It's connected to the large intestine.

It is not known exactly what the appendix does, but removing it is not harmful.

Symptoms of appendicitis

Appendicitis usually starts with a pain in the middle of your tummy (abdomen) that may come and go.

Within hours, the pain travels to the lower right-hand side of the body. This is where the appendix usually lies. The pain can become constant and severe.

Things that may make the pain worse include:

- pressing on the area
- coughing
- walking

You may lose your appetite, feel sick and have constipation or [diarrhoea](#).

Read more about the [symptoms of appendicitis](#)

When to get medical help

If abdominal pain is getting worse, contact your GP immediately.

Call 999 or 112 to ask for an ambulance if:

- you have pain that suddenly gets worse and spreads across your abdomen
- your pain temporarily improves before getting worse again

If the pain eases for a while but then gets worse, your appendix may have burst. This can lead to life-threatening complications.

Read more about [diagnosing appendicitis](#) and [complications of appendicitis](#).

Causes of appendicitis

It's not clear what causes appendicitis. It may be that something blocks the entrance of the appendix.

For example, it could be blocked by a small piece of poo. Sometimes an infection could cause the lymph node in the wall of the bowel to become swollen. The inflammation and swelling could lead to increased pressure in the appendix. This may then burst.

As the causes of appendicitis are not fully understood, there's no way of preventing it.

Who's affected

Appendicitis is a common condition. You can get appendicitis at any age. It usually affects young people aged between 10 to 20 years.

Treating appendicitis

If you have appendicitis, it's likely your appendix will need to be removed as soon as possible.

Removal of the appendix is one of the most common operations in Ireland and its success rate is excellent. The operation to remove your appendix is known as an appendicectomy or appendectomy.

It's usually carried out as keyhole surgery. Several small cuts are made in the tummy (abdomen). These allow special surgical instruments to be inserted.

Open surgery is usually used if the appendix has burst or access is more difficult. Open surgery is where a larger, single cut is made in the abdomen.

It usually takes a couple of weeks to make a full recovery after your appendix has been removed. Strenuous activities may need to be avoided for up to 6 weeks after having open surgery.

Read more about [treatment for appendicitis](#)

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