

Abdominal Pain in Children

(Possible Appendicitis)

Today your child was seen for abdominal (belly) pain. Belly pain is common in children. Most often the cause of pain is a stomach virus or constipation (hard, dry stools). **We do not think your child has appendicitis. Your child may go home.**

What is appendicitis?

The appendix is a small pouch that hangs off the large intestine. If the appendix becomes swollen and infected, it is called appendicitis. This often feels like a stomach ache, so it can be hard to diagnose.

If not treated, the appendix could burst open and spread infection. We remove an infected appendix as soon as possible.

What are the symptoms of appendicitis?

The first sign tends to be pain around the belly button. Over the next 1 to 2 days, the pain may get worse. New symptoms may develop such as:

- Belly pain on the lower right side
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea (feeling sick to your stomach) and vomiting (throwing up)
- Fussiness
- Fever, usually after 1 to 2 days.

How do you know if a child has appendicitis?

Our doctors are skilled at finding out if a child has appendicitis. First we ask questions and do a physical exam. We may do blood and urine tests. We may also do an ultrasound (use sound waves) or CT scans (use X-rays) to see inside the belly.

In rare cases, it may be too soon to tell if the problem is appendicitis. If so, we may suggest returning for another exam within 24 hours.

Do you take CT scans?

A CT scan uses X-rays to take pictures of the inside of the body. The radiation from CT scans can add up and be harmful over a lifetime. It is best to avoid this test for a child unless it is clearly needed. If we need to do a CT scan, we will take special steps to limit the radiation your child receives.

How do I care for my child at home?

Your child's pain should go away over the next 24 hours. Your child should rest and avoid heavy activity until feeling better. Be sure to follow your doctor's advice.

Medicines

- Your doctor may prescribe pain medicine, such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Motrin (ibuprofen).

- Do not give your child medicines for nausea or diarrhea (loose, watery stools) unless prescribed by your doctor.

Food

- Give your child foods that are gentle on the stomach. Examples: white rice, bread, soup, yogurt, fruit juice without pulp and tender meats.
- Avoid foods that are hard on the stomach. Examples: orange juice, nuts, seeds, beans, processed tough meats and fried, fatty or spicy foods.
- As the pain gets better, your child may return to a normal diet (usually after 1 to 2 days).

Call right away if your child has:

- Belly pain that does not improve or gets worse over the next 24 to 48 hours
- Diarrhea, nausea or vomiting that starts or gets worse
- Temperature over 100.4°F (38°C) when taken by mouth
- Belly swelling
- Trouble passing stools (bowel movement) over the next 3 to 5 days
- Weakness, dizziness or is very sleepy, confused or passes out.

In an emergency, call 911.

For more information:

Call nurse advisors' line: 612-672-1065 or
Visit www.pemguidelines.org