



## Children's Health

# Appendicitis

### WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

The appendix is a thin, worm-shaped pouch that projects out from the first part of the colon. In some animals, the appendix plays an important role in the digestive process. In humans, the appendix is small (just under 4 inches long) and seems to have no function at all.

For reasons yet unknown, the appendix can become obstructed with a particle of undigested food, bowel material or other matter. The appendix will then become swollen, inflamed and filled with pus. If this is left unattended, the appendix will eventually burst, flooding the normally sterile abdominal cavity. Infection can then spread to surrounding organs, leading to blood poisoning, shock or death.

#### IF YOU SUSPECT APPENDICITIS...

- ▶ don't give your child laxatives—they can stimulate the intestine and cause the appendix to rupture sooner.
- ▶ don't give pain medication to your child—the location and severity of the pain are important clues to a proper diagnosis.
- ▶ don't apply heat to the abdomen.
- ▶ take your child to the doctor immediately.
- ▶ have your child stand on tip-toes and bounce down on his heels. If this jarring causes pain in the lower right abdomen, call the doctor.

#### HOW APPENDICITIS IS TREATED

An appendectomy, surgical removal of the appendix, is the treatment of choice. A child with a burst appendix, if treated promptly, can have a full recovery.



#### RECOGNIZE THE SYMPTOMS

*sudden pain that usually begins in the upper abdomen and then moves down to the lower right part of the abdomen with increasing pain*

*nausea or vomiting*

*loss of appetite*

*constipation*

*low-grade fever*

*tenderness or rigidity in the abdominal area*