Appendicitis:

Appendicitis is inflammation of the appendix. It may be acute or chronic.

Appendicitis occurs most often between the ages of 10 and 30. It is more common in men than in women. Untreated appendicitis can be fatal.

Causes:

Scientists think this condition is caused by an obstruction in the appendix. Obstruction may be either partial or complete. Complete obstruction is cause for emergency surgery.

Obstruction is often caused by an accumulation of fecal matter. It can also be caused by:

* enlarged lymphoid follicles
* worms
* trauma
* tumors

When the appendix is obstructed, bacteria can multiply inside the organ. This leads to the formation of pus. The increased pressure can be painful. It can also compress local blood vessels. A lack of blood flow to the appendix may cause gangrene.

If the appendix ruptures, fecal matter can fill the abdomen. This is a medical emergency.

Peritonitis is one possible consequence of a ruptured appendix. It is an inflammation of the tissue that lines the abdominal wall. Other organs can also become inflamed after a rupture. Affected organs may include the cecum, bladder, and sigmoid colon.

If the infected appendix leaks instead of ruptures, it can form an abscess. This confines the infection to a small area. However, an abscess can still be dangerous.

Symptoms of appendicitis include:

* lower right side abdominal pain
* loss of appetite
* nausea
* vomiting
* diarrhea
* constipation
* inability to pass gas
* abdominal swelling
* low grade fever
* a sense you might feel better after passing stool

. Appendicitis can quickly become a medical emergency. Rupture rarely happens within the first 24 hours of symptoms. However, up 80 percent of people who have symptoms for 48 hours will end up with a ruptured appendix.

A perforated appendix can be fatal. The risk of death is highest in infants and the elderly.

Diagnosis

A physical exam for appendicitis looks for tenderness in the lower right quadrant of your abdomen.

In rare cases, appendicitis may get better without surgery. Treatment might involve only antibiotics and a liquid diet.

In most cases, however, surgery will be necessary If you have an abscess that has not ruptured, you will first be treated with antibiotics. Your abscess will then be drained with a tube placed through your skin. Surgery will remove your appendix after your infection has been treated.

If you have a ruptured abscess or appendix, surgery may be needed right away. Surgery to remove the appendix is called an appendectomy.

Prevention

Appendicitis cannot be prevented. However, it is less common in people who have diets high in fiber. This includes diets which contain lots of fresh fruits and vegetables.