

Appendix Surgery

(Appendectomy)

Your surgery and recovery at home

This booklet belongs to: _____

We also give you 'Preparing for Your Surgery' booklet.

Read both booklets carefully.

Bring both booklets to every hospital visit before your surgery.

Appointments after surgery

See your family practitioner 7 to 10 days after going home from the hospital.

My appointment is on: _____

See your surgeon 3 to 4 weeks after going home from the hospital.

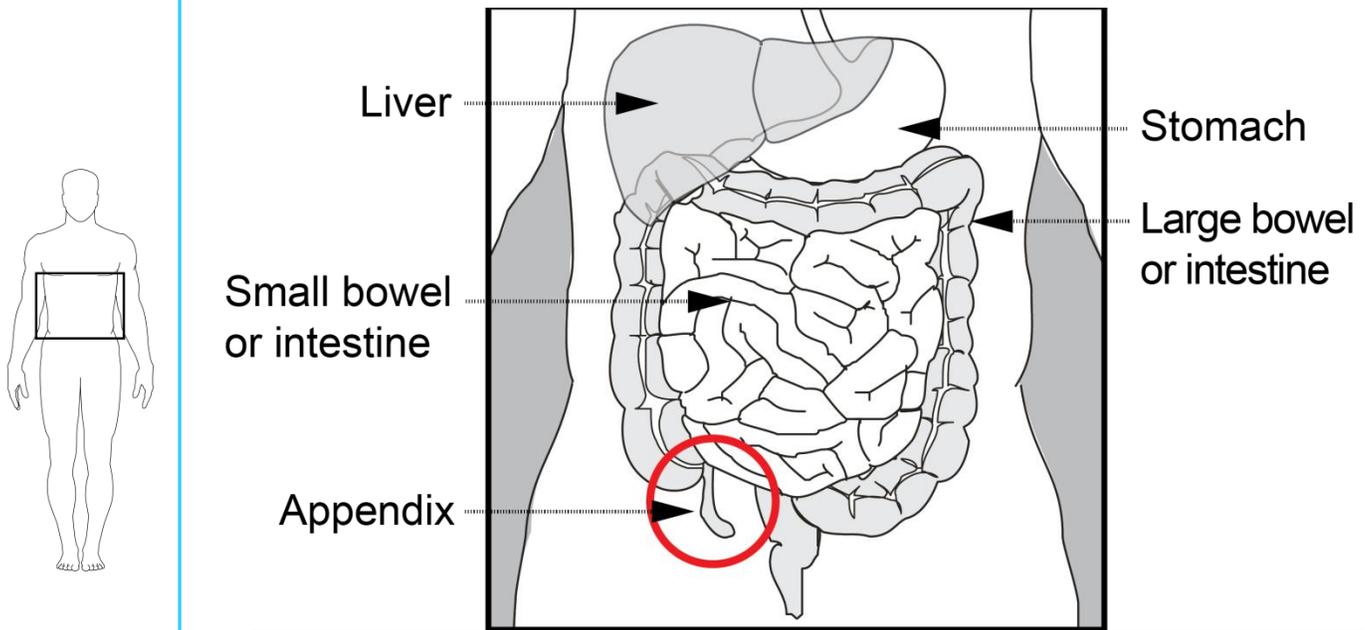
My appointment is on: _____

Appendix Surgery

(appendectomy)

You are having surgery (an operation) to remove your appendix.

The appendix is a small, hollow pouch that hangs down from the large intestine (bowel). It is located in the lower right part of your belly. This surgery is done to remove an infected appendix (appendicitis).



This surgery can be done one of two ways:

1. **Open incision:** The surgeon makes one long cut through the skin (an incision) and does the surgery through that opening. You will have an incision 5 centimetres (2 to 3 inches) long in your lower abdomen. This surgery usually takes about 1 to 2 hours.
2. **Laparoscopy:** The surgeon makes 3 to 4 small cuts in your abdomen. Through one of these incisions, the surgeon inserts a tiny camera (a laparoscope) so the area can be viewed on a video monitor. The surgery is done using different long skinny tools inserted through the other small incisions. This surgery usually takes about 1 hour.

You and your surgeon choose what is best for you.

Read 'Preparing for Your Surgery' booklet for instructions on how to prepare for your surgery.

After Your Surgery

Going home

How long you stay in the hospital depends on:

- your health before the surgery
- the type of surgery
- how you recover from the surgery

Most people can go home 1 to 2 days after surgery, for both open and laparoscopic surgery.

You are ready to go when:

- ✓ You are eating and drinking regular food and drinks.
- ✓ Your pain is well controlled with pills.
- ✓ You know what medications (including new ones) you are taking, how to take them, and why you need them.
- ✓ You have prescription(s) for your medications, if needed.
- ✓ You have a ride home from the hospital.
- ✓ You have arranged for some help at home for the first few days, if needed.



Caring for Yourself at Home

Managing pain

If you have been living with pain before surgery, be sure to tell your surgeon how you manage this pain, such as with medicines, herbs, supplements, cannabis products, other substances, massage, yoga, meditation, etc. This helps your surgeon create the best plan with you for managing pain after surgery.

It is normal to have some discomfort or pain when you return home. This should steadily improve but might last for a few days to a couple of weeks.

How much pain you have and how much pain medicine you need depends on the type of surgery you had, how it was done (open or laparoscopy), and if you were using anything for pain before surgery. Your pain should be at a comfortable level that allows you to move, take deep breaths, cough, and to do every day activities.

Remember

You can do other things to help ease your pain or distract you from the pain:

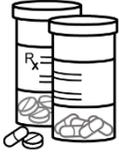
- ✓ Slow breathing
- ✓ Listen to music
- ✓ Watch T.V.

When you are ready to go home, your surgeon will give you instructions to take pain medicine. This might include a prescription for an opioid (narcotic).

For the first few days:

If your pain is at an uncomfortable level, take your pain medicine as directed. As your pain improves, take your pain medicine less often and/or a smaller amount until you have little or no pain, then stop.

At first, you might have to take a prescription medication. After a short time and as your pain improves, a non-prescription pain medicine should be enough to manage your pain.



Questions about medicines?

Call your local pharmacy and ask to speak to the pharmacist.

For after-hours help, call 8-1-1.

Ask to speak to a pharmacist.

Family Practitioner:

Refers to either a family doctor or nurse practitioner

Non-prescription pain medicines (also called ‘over-the-counter’ medicines) – You buy them at the pharmacy without a prescription. You might only need to take this type of medicine if you don’t have much pain after surgery.

Examples of non-prescription medicines (and brand names):

- acetaminophen (Tylenol®)
- acetylsalicylic acid or ASA (Aspirin®)
- non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs)

Examples: ibuprofen (Advil®, Motrin®) ★
 naproxen (Naprosyn, Aleve®) ★

★ **Note:** **NSAIDs are not for everyone after surgery.** If you have (or have had) health problems such as stomach ulcers, kidney disease, or a heart condition, check with your surgeon or family practitioner before using NSAIDs.

Opioid (narcotic) pain medicines – You might get a small number of pills for severe pain. They are only meant to be taken for a short time. Take only as much as you need to allow you to do daily activities.

Examples of opioid pain medicines:

- Tramacet® (tramadol and acetaminophen) ★
- Tylenol #3® (codeine and acetaminophen) ★
- Oxycocet® / Percocet® (oxycodone and acetaminophen) ★
- tramadol, hydromorphone, morphine, oxycodone

★ **Note:** These medications also have 300 to 325mg acetaminophen in each tablet. All total, **do not** take more than 4000mg of acetaminophen in 24 hours (too much can harm your liver).

When taking non-prescription pain medicines as well, most people need to take a lower amount of the opioid or take the opioid less often.

Always read the label and/or information from the pharmacist for how to safely take medication.

♦ See back page for safe use of opioid pain medicines ♦

Drinking and eating

It might take some time before your appetite returns to normal. To heal, your body needs extra calories and nutrients, especially protein.

To get the nutrients you need:

- Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of liquid each day (unless you have been told differently because of a medical condition).
- Eat foods high in protein such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, peanut butter, tofu, or legumes.



Need help with food choices?

Call 8-1-1.
Ask to speak to a dietitian.

Keeping your bowels regular

You can get constipated because you are taking opioid pain medication, are less active, or eating less fibre.

To prevent constipation:

- Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of liquid each day (unless you have been told differently because of a medical condition).
- Eat high fibre foods such as bran, prunes, whole grains, vegetables, and fruit.
- Increase your activity.



If you continue to be constipated, talk with a pharmacist or family practitioner about taking a laxative.

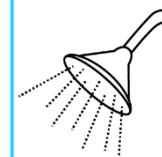
Caring for your incision

Always wash your hands before and after touching around your incision site(s).

Before you leave the hospital, your nurse will teach you how to care for your incision(s).

Showering:

- You can shower 2 days after the surgery.
- Continue to take only showers for at least 2 weeks after your surgery.
- Try not to let the shower spray directly on your incision(s) or bandage if still covered. Gently pat the area dry.



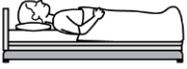
For at least the next 2 weeks or until the incision is healed:

- × No soaking in a bath tub or hot tub.
- × No swimming.
- × No creams, lotions, or ointments on your incision, unless directed by your surgeon.

Doing any of these things could delay healing.

Getting rest

It is very common in the first few weeks to feel tired and have low energy. Rest and sleep help you heal.

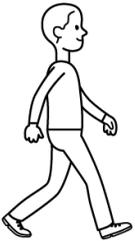


Try to get at least 8 hours of sleep each night. Take rest breaks and naps during the day, as needed.

If you have trouble sleeping, talk to your family practitioner.

Being active

Activity and exercise help build and maintain your muscle strength, give you more energy, and help with recovery. You need to find a balance between rest and activity. Pace yourself for the first few weeks.



Slowly increase how much you do each day (your activity level). Increase the distance and time you walk. Only increase your activity level as much as you comfortably can.

If you are still having pain, exercise 30 minutes after you have taken your pain medication.

Your surgeon will tell you when you can increase your activities at your follow-up appointment.

For the next 4 to 6 weeks, limit heavy activities to protect your incision and abdominal muscles:

- ✘ **Do not** lift, push, or pull anything over 4 to 5 kilograms (10 pounds). This includes carrying children and groceries.
- ✘ **Do not** vacuum, rake leaves, paint walls, reach for things in high places, or any other reaching activity.
- ✘ **Do not** play any sports, do high intensity exercise, or weight training.

You can return to **sexual activity** when you feel ready and your pain is well controlled.

Usually, you can return to **driving** when you can shoulder check and comfortably wear your seatbelt. If you are not sure about it, ask your surgeon.

Remember: Do not drive when you are taking opioid pain medication.



A 4 litre milk jug weighs 4kg (9 pounds)



When to get help

Call your surgeon or family practitioner if:

- You have a fever over 38°C (101°F).
- Your incision is warm, red, swollen, or has blood or pus (yellow/green fluid) draining from it.
- You have a cough that continues to get worse.
- You notice stinging, burning, or pain when you urinate (go pee) or your urine smells bad.
- You have redness, tenderness, or pain in your calf or lower leg.
- Your pain does not ease with pain medicine, or stops you from moving and recovering.
- You are throwing up often.
- You have diarrhea that is severe or continues for more than 2 days.
- You feel increasingly tired or dizzy.

Cannot contact the surgeon or family practitioner?

Have any questions about your recovery?

▶ Call Fraser Health Virtual Care, 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m., daily **1-800-314-0999**
fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare

▶ Call **8-1-1** (HealthLinkBC) to speak to a registered nurse any time - day or night.

▶ **Call 9-1-1** if you have any of the following:

- trouble breathing or shortness of breath
- chest pain
- sudden, severe pain

9-1-1



HealthLinkBC is available in 130 languages.

For an interpreter, say your language in English. Wait until an interpreter comes on the phone.

Questions you might have:

Examples: 'When will I be able to return to my regular activities?' 'When can I go back to work?' 'When can I return to my sports?'

Safe use of opioid pain medicines

If you are using any medicines with opioids (narcotics) in them, we want you to do so safely. However, serious problems can happen. Take note of the following safety information.

Before taking opioids:

- Tell your surgeon if you have sleep apnea. Opioids can make your sleep apnea worse.

Safely storing opioids:

- Store opioid medicines in a secure place.
- Keep out of sight and out of reach of children, teens, and pets.
- Never share your opioid medicine with anyone else.

Safely disposing of unused opioids:

- Take any unused opioid medicines back to your pharmacy to be safely disposed. **Do not** keep unused medicines at home.

Safely taking opioids:

- Your pain should lessen over the first week. You should not need to take opioid pain medicine for more than 1 week.
- Always use the least amount possible for the shortest amount of time.
- Common side effects include constipation, feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), a dry mouth, sweating, dizziness, and feeling drowsy.
- **Do not** crush, cut, break, chew, or dissolve opioids before taking. Doing this could cause serious harm, even death.
- While taking opioid pain medicines: **Do not** drive or drink alcohol. **Do not** take any sleeping pills unless your doctor has said you can.

www.fraserhealth.ca

This information does not replace the advice given to you by your healthcare provider.

Catalogue #265588 (December 2020)

To order: patienteduc.fraserhealth.ca

