Quick Facts about Appendix Cancer

What is the appendix?

The appendix is a pouch-like tube attached to the first part of the large intestine (cecum). The appendix is about 10 centimetres long and has no known major role in the body.
What is appendix cancer?
Appendix cancer begins when normal cells in the appendix change and start to grow out of control. A tumour, or mass of cells, may form. At first, the cells are precancerous, meaning they are abnormal but not cancer yet. If the precancerous cells change into cancer or malignant cells, and spread deeper or to other parts of the body, the condition is called appendix or appendiceal cancer.

What are the symptoms of appendix cancer?

- Appendicitis (a condition where the appendix becomes swollen, red, tender and painful)
- Fluid build-up in the abdomen area
- Bloating (feeling of fullness in the abdomen area)
- Pain in the abdomen or pelvis area
- Larger or growing waistline
- Changes in bowel movement
- Infertility (unable to conceive a child)
What does stage mean?

Once a diagnosis of cancer has been made, the cancer will be given a stage.

Stage is used to describe:
- Where the cancer is located
- If or where it has spread
- If it is affecting other organs in the body (like the abdomen)

There are 5 stages for appendix cancer:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 0</td>
<td>There is no sign of cancer in the appendix.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>The tumour is 2 centimetres or smaller.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>The tumour is larger than 2 centimetres but smaller than 4 centimetres, or it has spread to the large intestine.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>The tumour is larger than 4 centimetres or has spread into the small intestine.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>The tumour has spread to the abdominal wall or other nearby organs.</td>
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What does grade mean?

Grade describes how much the tumour looks and acts like normal tissue under a microscope. There are 4 grades (Grade 1 to Grade 4).

Lower grade cells look and act similar to normal cells. They are slower-growing and less likely to spread.

Higher grade cells look and act abnormally. They grow faster and are more likely to spread. The grade of cancer can help predict how quickly the cancer might grow.
How is appendix cancer treated?

Appendix cancer treatment depends on many things such as the tumour type, location, stage and grade. Treatment for appendix cancer can be used separately or together.

There are 3 main types of treatment:

1. **Surgery:** Surgery is the most common way to treat appendix cancer. It usually involves removing the tumour and a small area around the tumour. If the tumour is small, only the appendix will be removed. This is called an appendectomy. If the tumour is larger, some of the colon or peritoneum (lining of the abdomen) will be removed. Often appendix cancer can be treated with surgery alone.

2. **Chemotherapy:** Chemotherapy is the use of drugs to kill cancer cells. It is most often used soon after surgery when cancer is found outside of the appendix area.

3. **Radiation therapy:** Although less common than surgery and chemotherapy, radiation therapy can be used for treatment. Radiation can also be used to control the symptoms and pain of advanced cancer. The treatment involves using high-energy x-rays or other particles to kill cancer cells.
Coping with appendix cancer

Dealing with the news of a cancer diagnosis can be very difficult. You are not alone. If you have any concerns or needs, please tell your health care team. They are here to care and support you through this time. Also, as a patient here at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, you have access to many resources to help you throughout your cancer journey.

These include:

- **Social workers** who can help you better cope with your diagnosis.
- **Registered Dietitians** that specialize in cancer and can help you with your nutrition and diet concerns.
- **The Patient & Family Library** (on the main floor), where you have access to a wide range of resources (like books, electronic books, audiobooks, DVDs), and you can ask a librarian to search for specific health information.
- **ELLICSR: the Health, Wellness & Cancer Survivorship Centre**, where patients and their families can find information on health and wellness, speak with healthcare professionals, meet other patients, and take part in health and wellness programs like gentle exercise and cooking classes. ELLICSR is located in the basement of the Clinical Services Building in the Toronto General Hospital.
- **The Palliative Care team** who can provide the care, comfort and support needed for those with advanced cancer.

For more information about the above support or other services available to you, please ask a member of your health care team (such as your doctor or nurse).
Questions to ask your doctor

Speaking to your health care team is important in helping you make decisions about your health care. Sometimes preparing a list of questions you want to ask can be helpful.

Here is a list of common questions you may want to ask your doctor:

1. What type of appendix cancer do I have?
2. What stage is my appendix cancer?
3. What grade is my appendix cancer?
4. Has the cancer spread to my lymph nodes or anywhere else?
5. Can you explain my treatment options?
6. What clinical trials are open to me?
7. How will this treatment benefit me?
8. What is the expected timeline for my treatment plan?
9. How will this treatment affect my daily life?
10. Will I be able to work, exercise or do my usual daily activities?
11. What are the possible long-term side effects of my cancer treatment?
12. Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
13. Who do I call if I have questions or a problem?
14. Is there anything else I should know?
Other medical terms to know

**Benign**: A tumour that is not cancerous.

**Biopsy**: Removing a small cell sample that is used to check for cancer under a microscope.

**Debulking surgery**: Also called cytoreduction. It is a type of surgery used to treat advanced appendix cancer. It involves removing as much of the tumour as possible even though not all cancer cells will be removed. Sometimes debulking surgery is done after chemotherapy.

**Dysplasia**: An abnormal growth of precancerous cells.

**Hemicolecotomy**: A type of operation used to treat appendix cancer. It involves removing some of the colon, blood vessels and/or lymph nodes near the tumour.

**Lymph node**: A tiny, bean-shaped organ that is found throughout your body. They are an important part of your immune system, and help your body recognize and fight infection.

**Malignant**: A tumour that is cancerous.

**Metastasis**: The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body.

**Oncologist**: A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer.

**Prognosis**: Chance of recovery.

**Rectum**: The last 15 to 20 centimetres of the large intestine. The rectum stores solid waste until it leaves the body through the anus.

**Spleen**: An organ in the abdomen area that is part of the immune system. The spleen produces and removes blood cells.

**Surgical Oncologist**: A doctor who specializes in treating cancer using surgery.

**Tumour**: A mass of cells that need a biopsy or removal.

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