



What to expect after surgery: Appendectomy

Patient and family information, brought to you by the Education Committee of APSA

The following list provides general recommendations and things to monitor after your child's appendectomy. When your child is ready to go home, your surgeon will provide you with their specific care instructions. If there are any differences between these guidelines and your surgeon's instructions, please clarify them with your surgeon.

Pain management:

- Pain at the incision(s) after surgery is normal, especially at the belly button (for a laparoscopic surgery). This pain is typically at its worst by 2-3 days after surgery, then steadily improves.
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol®) and/or ibuprofen will usually be all that your child needs to manage their pain. Follow the instructions on the bottle to ensure your child is getting the proper dose.
- For the first one or two days after surgery, it is often recommended to give the medications on a schedule, rather than wait until the pain is bad. Two options are:
 - Alternate doses of acetaminophen and ibuprofen every 3 hours throughout the day. For example, acetaminophen is given at 12:00 and 6:00, and ibuprofen is given at 3:00 and 9:00. It may be helpful to make a chart to keep track of each dose.
 - Give acetaminophen and ibuprofen together every 6 hours.
 - It is usually better to let your child sleep than to wake them for an overnight dose. Just give the pain medicine when they wake up.
- **Do not give more than 4 doses of acetaminophen (Tylenol®) per day.**
- If your surgeon gave you a prescription for another pain medicine, make sure you follow the instructions for the dose and frequency.
- Ice packs or Boo-Boo Buddies® can also be placed on the incisions, if your child will tolerate it.

Wound management:

- If your child has gauze or a bandage covering any incision, this should be removed by 48-72 hours after surgery.
- You might also see small white tapes (Steri-Strips™) or a clear-purple surgical glue placed directly on the incisions. You should leave these in place, and they will start to peel up within 1-2 weeks.
- Do not put any additional ointments or creams on the incisions or glue without discussing it with your surgeon.

Activity:

- Normal daily activities are encouraged immediately after surgery, including going up and down any stairs in the home.
- Encourage your child to rest when feeling tired or sore.

- Activity can be advanced as tolerated, but if your child has pain at any of the incisions, especially the belly button, then they should stop and rest.
- If their pain does not improve, or it returns with activity, your child should allow another 1 to 2 weeks before trying this activity again.
- Unless you are told otherwise, participation on sports teams or in gym class should wait until your child has their post-operative visit (usually about 2 weeks after surgery).

School:

- It can take up to a week for children to feel ready for school when recovering from an appendectomy. Your surgeon will tell you when it is safe for your child to return to school.
- When possible, your child should avoid lifting and carrying a heavy backpack for the first few weeks.

Bathing:

- In general, your child's incision should be kept dry for about 48 hours. Your surgeon will have specific instructions for when your child can take a shower, a bath, and go swimming.
- It may be easier to take off any gauze bandages in the shower.
- It is OK for the Steri-Strips™ or surgical glue to get wet at this time.

Diet:

- After an appendectomy your child should be able to eat what they normally would.
- A special diet is not required after appendectomy.
- Your child may eat less than usual for the first day or two after surgery. If you find that your child's appetite does not return to normal within a week of surgery, contact your surgeon's office.

Bowel movements:

- The intestines can be slowed-down after surgery, and the first bowel movement might not occur until 1-5 days after appendectomy. As long as your child is not having tummy pain and is eating and drinking, not having a bowel movement for a few days is OK.
- Daily fiber supplements (Metamucil®, Benefiber® or similar) to keep bowel movements soft, can be helpful. This helps avoid straining, which can be uncomfortable at the incisions.
- If you think your child is constipated, contact your child's surgeon before giving any over-the-counter laxatives.

When to call your surgeon's office

- If your child has a fever over 100.5°F (38°C), especially if it is more than 2 days from surgery.
- Worsening abdominal pain, down low in the belly or where the appendicitis pain was.
- Pain or swelling at any incision that is getting worse.
- Spreading redness, warmth or drainage at any of the incision sites.
- On-going nausea or inability to drink/eat.
- New-onset diarrhea, especially if associated with a fever.
- The stitches come loose or the incision opens.