Acute Appendicitis

NHS.UK Appendicitis (Aug 2024) | PMC Atypical Presentations Review (2023)

999: Rupture, Peritonitis, or Sepsis

- ☐ Pain spreading across the whole abdomen after a brief improvement: possible ruptured appendix
- ☐ Pale, sweating, visibly unwell, or complaining of palpitations
- ☐ Patient lying very still, unable to tolerate any movement
- ☐ Confusion, blotchy skin, or difficulty breathing: signs of sepsis
- ☐ Pregnant patient with severe pain and signs of collapse or deterioration

URGENT: Same-Day Medical Assessment

- ☐ Pain migrated from around the belly button to the lower right abdomen
- ☐ Abdominal pain progressively worsening over hours without settling
- ☐ Right lower abdominal pain in any woman of childbearing age: exclude ectopic pregnancy
- ☐ Worsening pain with fever or vomiting in a child or older adult
- ☐ Lower abdominal pain in a boy or young man: ask about scrotal pain or swelling (testicular torsion is also a surgical emergency)
- ☐ Do not advise waiting at home. Pharmacy cannot assess for appendicitis.

Diarrhoea does not exclude appendicitis. Do not use it to favour gastroenteritis. Appendicitis can present with loose stools, especially in children or pelvic appendicitis.

SHARP: Quick Assessment at the Counter

S	**Site migrating?**	Pain started around the belly button and moved to the lower right side over hours: one of the most characteristic features of appendicitis.
H	**Hunched posture?**	Walking slowly, bent forward, or holding the abdomen: involuntary guarding on movement.
A	**Appetite gone?**	Marked loss of appetite, even for favourite food: an early and consistent feature.
R	**Rough movement worsens it?**	Pain worse on walking, coughing, or going over a bump: suggests peritoneal irritation. Refer urgently.
P	**Pregnancy possible?**	Always consider ectopic pregnancy in women of childbearing age with right lower abdominal pain. A surgical emergency.

WHILE AWAITING ASSESSMENT

- ☐ Avoid eating or drinking in case surgery is needed
- ☐ Do not apply heat to the abdomen
- ☐ Note the time the pain first started: the surgical team will need this
- ☐ Pain relief is acceptable: analgesia does not mask appendicitis in current practice
- ☐ Call 999 if pain spreads, becomes severe, or improves briefly then worsens sharply

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