When Is a Pain in the Gut Appendicitis?

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Quincy Greene, MD

Burke County Teens Take Part in National Kick Butts Day

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Appendicitis occurs when the lumen or inner lining of the appendix becomes blocked and then inflamed and swollen. If left untreated, appendicitis can lead to infection, blockage of blood flow, gangrene, and, eventually, rupture of the appendix with life-threatening infection spreading throughout the inner body cavity.

"There's no non-surgical treatment for appendicitis," Dr. Greene said. "The appendix must be removed."

About seven percent of Americans get appendicitis at some point in their lives. It can strike at any age but most frequently occurs between ages 10 and 30.

KNOW THE SIGNS

Pain is usually the key symptom, but as many as four percent of patients showing up at the emergency room or outpatient clinic have abdominal pain, and not all are suffering from appendicitis. Note the precise location and nature of the pain to tell the doctor.

"Typically, appendicitis pain starts in the mid abdomen, near the naval, and then shifts to the lower right quadrant, about halfway between the naval and the top of the pelvic bone," Dr. Greene said. "It may get worse when you cough, sneeze, take a deep breath or move around."

When touched gently, the specific area will feel tender. The location and nature of pain may vary, particularly in young children and pregnant women. As the pain gets worse, it may be accompanied by other symptoms:

• nausea and sometimes vomiting;
• loss of appetite;
• constipation (or in some cases, diarrhea);
• inability to pass gas;
• abdominal swelling; and
• a low-grade fever that may come on relatively late.

These are symptoms similar to those of numerous other digestive ailments such as bladder infections, kidney stones, ovarian cysts, pelvic inflammatory disease and Crohn's disease. Most of these are also serious conditions, so if you have persistent abdominal pain accompanied by a slight fever, you should have it checked out by a physician.

In most cases, a doctor can diagnose appendicitis through listening to a history of symptoms and conducting a physical examination.

If left untreated, the most serious consequence is a ruptured appendix, with the contents of the intestine - including the infectious organisms - flooding the abdominal cavity. An infection of the lining of the body cavity (peritonitis) is clearly life threatening, even with emergency treatment.

When an appendix ruptures, the patient usually reacts immediately with relief from the severe localized pain. Within a short time, however, the entire abdomen will become swollen with gas and fluid. There will be pain, tightness and tenderness throughout the abdomen. Other signs may include fever, thirst and difficulty urinating.

Children are more vulnerable than adults to rupture, perhaps because it's more difficult for them to communicate the nature and severity of symptoms. It's important for parents to be alert to the signs and not to minimize the seriousness of a severe belly ache.

Another effect of appendicitis may be seepage of intestinal contents into an abscess, a walled-off area of infection that may be small as a grapefruit. This abscess requires prompt treatment; otherwise, it will rupture, leading to peritonitis.

"At any stage, appendicitis requires surgery, either by traditional abdominal surgery or laparoscopy," Dr. Greene said.

Both of these surgeries can be performed at Grace orVAldesese Hospitals. "If an abscess is present or the appendix is ruptured, traditional surgery is required to allow us to clean the abdominal cavity," he added.

With prompt action, appendicitis can be readily treated with no lasting effects on digestion.

For more information or to make an appointment with Dr. Greene, call 580-3572.

Burke County Teens Take Part in National Kick Butts Day

MORGANTON – Young people from Burke County high schools are joining thousands of teens across the state in an effort to take part today in Kick Butts Day (KBD), a nationwide initiative that makes kids leaders in the effort to stop youth tobacco use.

As part of the KBD celebration, Tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death in the US, killing more than 400,000 people every year. Each day, more than 4,000 kids try their first cigarettes; another 1,000 become addicted smokers, one-third of whom will die prematurely as a result.

ABOUT TRU:

Tobacco. Realities. Unfiltered, com-
monly known as TRU, uses testimo-
nials of real North Carolina teens as well as hard-hitting facts to dis-
suade youth from using tobacco. Funded by a $1.5 million grant from the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, this grassroots initiative includes the TRU media campaign, as well as a grant programs to organiza-
tions working to reduce tobacco use. For more information or to make an appointment with Dr. Greene, call 580-3572.

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Blue Ridge HealthCare

Blue Ridge Urology

Blue Ridge Urology is currently accepting new patients. Board Certified Urologist M. Brian Bauer, MD brings comprehensive urological care using the most advanced techniques available.

Dr. Bauer specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases of the urinary system in men and women and disorders of the male reproductive system.

Call 580-7962 to schedule an appointment.