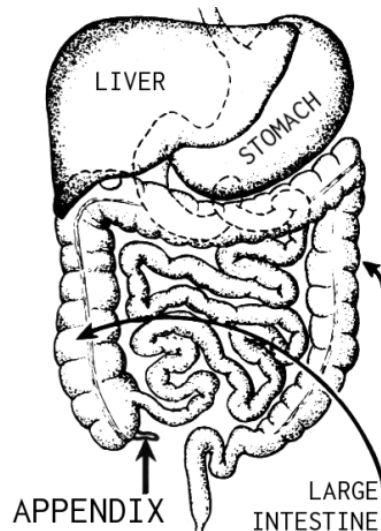


What is an appendix?



Adapted from Scientific America.

Carl remembers the day in elementary school when he woke up and had a terrible stomachache. Even though he insisted to his mom that he didn't feel well, she told him to go to school. However, once he got to school he continued to feel a pain in his right side. After an hour, Carl told the teacher what was wrong and that he was feeling very unwell.

Carl's mother took him to the doctor and his doctor told him something was wrong with his appendix and that it would have to be removed! Carl was scared, but the surgery didn't take long and he felt much better afterwards. Carl had what is called an 'appendicitis'.

*Most people don't spend much time thinking about their appendix until they have a problem with it. The **appendix** is a small organ located off the large intestine, right around the area where the small and large intestines meet.*

As you can see from the image, the appendix is a little tube-shaped pouch, like a little finger, about 4 inches long. In most people, it's located on the right side of their abdomen.

For years, the appendix has been considered to be an almost 'useless' organ. This strange 'bag' attached to our intestines is not usually thought of as an extremely important part of our biology! This organ is mostly involved in helping support your immune system. There is some evidence that in young adults, the appendix may help support white blood cells and increase our immunity to germs. So is this organ actually helpful to our survival as a species... and if not, why do we still have it?

In the past, the appendix was often removed during other abdominal (stomach) surgeries to prevent any possibility of a later appendicitis (infection in the appendix). An appendicitis is a swelling + infection of the appendix that can be dangerous if not treated. Now, most doctors will not remove the appendix unless it is an emergency.