Appendix Cancer - Diagnosis

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Diagnosis

Doctors use many tests to diagnose cancer and find out if it has metastasized (spread). Some tests may also determine which treatments may be the most effective. For most types of cancer, a biopsy is the only way to make a definitive diagnosis of cancer. If a biopsy is not possible, the doctor may suggest other tests that will help make a diagnosis. Imaging tests may be used to find out whether the cancer has metastasized. Your doctor may consider these factors when choosing a diagnostic test:

- Age and medical condition
- Type of cancer suspected
- Severity of symptoms
- Previous test results

In addition to a physical exam, the following tests may be used to diagnose appendix cancer:

Biopsy [2]. A biopsy is the removal of a small amount of tissue for examination under a microscope. Other tests can suggest that cancer is present, but only a biopsy can make a definite diagnosis. The sample removed from the biopsy is analyzed by a pathologist (a doctor who specializes in interpreting laboratory tests and evaluating cells, tissues, and organs to diagnose disease).

However, most often, appendix cancer is found unexpectedly during or after abdominal surgery. If cancer is suspected at the time of surgery, the doctor will remove a portion of the colon and surrounding tissue (called a margin) for examination. Often, a patient will have an appendectomy (surgical removal of the appendix) for what is thought to be appendicitis, and the cancer is diagnosed after the pathologist has processed and reviewed the tissue under the microscope. In that case, another surgery is usually recommended to remove another margin of tissue around the area where the tumor began.

Computed tomography (CT or CAT) scan [3]. A CT scan creates a three-dimensional picture of the inside of the body with an x-ray machine. A computer then combines these images into a detailed, cross-sectional view that shows any abnormalities or tumors. Sometimes, a contrast medium (a special dye) is injected into a patient?s vein to provide better detail.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) [4]. An MRI uses magnetic fields, not x-rays, to produce detailed images of the body. A contrast medium may be injected into a patient?s vein to create a clearer picture.

Ultrasound [5]. An ultrasound uses sound waves to create a picture of the internal organs.

Radionuclide scanning (OctreoScan). A small amount of a radioactive, hormone-like substance that is attracted to a carcinoid tumor is injected into a vein. A special camera is then used to show where the radioactive substance accumulates. This procedure is useful in detecting spread of a carcinoid tumor, especially to the liver.

Learn more about what to expect when having common tests, procedures, and scans [6].

After these diagnostic tests are done, your doctor will review all of the results with you. If the diagnosis is cancer, these results also help the doctor describe the cancer; this is called staging [7]. Learn more about the first steps to take after a diagnosis of cancer [8].

Links:
[1] http://www.cancer.net/about-us
[2] http://www.cancer.net/node/24406
[3] http://www.cancer.net/node/24486
[4] http://www.cancer.net/node/24578
[5] http://www.cancer.net/node/24714
[6] http://www.cancer.net/node/24959
[7] http://www.cancer.net/node/18480
[8] http://www.cancer.net/node/24956