

Appendix Cancer - Diagnosis [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 04/2014

ON THIS PAGE: You will find a list of the common tests, procedures, and scans that doctors can use to find out what's wrong and identify the cause of the problem. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen.

Doctors use many tests to diagnose cancer and find out if it has spread to another part of the body, called metastasis. 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 spread. This list describes options for diagnosing this type of cancer, and not all tests listed will be used for every person. Your doctor may consider these factors when choosing a diagnostic test:

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

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

Biopsy [3]. 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 during the biopsy is analyzed by a pathologist. A pathologist is 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, which is the surgical removal of the appendix. This is usually done 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 [4]. 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. A CT scan can also be used to measure the tumor's size. Sometimes, a special dye called a contrast medium is given before the scan to provide better detail on the image. This dye can be injected into a patient's vein or given as a pill to swallow.

Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) [5]. An MRI uses magnetic fields, not x-rays, to produce detailed images of the body. A special dye called a contrast medium is given before the scan to create a clearer picture. This dye can be injected into a patient's vein or given as a pill to swallow.

Ultrasound [6]. 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.

After 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.

The next section helps explain the different stages for this type of cancer. Use the menu on the side of your screen to select Stages, or you can select another section, to continue reading this guide.

Links:

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/appendix-cancer/diagnosis>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24406>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24486>

[5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24578>

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24714>