



THE CANCER SOCIETY OF THE BAHAMAS

Appendix Cancer Awareness Month



Appendix Cancer, also known as Appendiceal Cancer, is a rare type of cancer that forms when cells turn abnormal and mutate rapidly in the appendix, a small and narrow pouch attached to the end of the large intestine. While the appendix's function is unknown, some researchers believe it plays a vital role in the body's immune system, as it contains lymphoid cells, which help the body fight infections. However, some believe it to be a vestigial organ, meaning it has no function and is unnecessary for survival.

Although relatively rare, there have been recent cases of Appendix Cancer in The Bahamas; thus, Bahamians need to become more aware of the disease, which is curable if caught early. To help Bahamians protect themselves against Appendix Cancer and detect it in its early stages, the Cancer Society is observing August as Appendix Cancer Awareness Month.

What are the different types of Appendix Cancer?

There are several types of Appendix Cancer, the two main ones being Carcinoid tumors and Adenocarcinomas.

Carcinoid tumors - Slow-growing and hard to detect, carcinoid tumors affect the neuroendocrine cells at the tip of the appendix and are the most common form of Appendix Cancer, accounting for 50% of all cases.

Adenocarcinomas - Commonly identified by the presence of glandular cells, which secrete bodily fluids, adenocarcinomas develop in the lining of the appendix.

What Do Bahamians Need to Be More Aware of?

Among those diagnosed with Appendix Cancer, symptoms can vary, though some do not experience any symptoms when the disease first starts to develop. When symptoms occur, they may include the following:

- Bloating or abdominal swelling
- Severe or persistent abdominal pain
- Vague pain in the lower right abdomen
- A change in bowel habits
- Early satiety (feeling of fullness) when eating
- Unexplained weight loss
- Nausea

Risk Factors

As with most types of cancer, there is no known cause of Appendix Cancer, but its risk factors, which vary from person to person, include:

Age: Among all age groups, Appendix Cancer is most prevalent in individuals over 50, though it is increasingly affecting people aged 40-49.

Medical history: According to research, diseases that reduce the stomach's ability to produce acid, such as atrophic gastritis or pernicious anemia, increase someone's risk of developing Appendix Cancer.

Family History: If you have a family history of Appendix Cancer or multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1, studies show that you are more at risk for developing it.

Smoking: Smoking can increase your risk of getting most types of cancer, including Appendix Cancer.

How can Bahamians prevent Appendix Cancer or lower their risk?

While there is no definite way to prevent Appendix Cancer, Bahamians can lower their risk by adopting healthier lifestyle changes, including exercising regularly, avoiding smoking, reducing or avoiding alcohol consumption, and consuming a balanced diet rich in fruits, whole foods, and vegetables. The appendix can develop benign low-grade appendiceal mucinous neoplasms (LAMNs), which, after breaking through the appendix wall, can secrete mucus containing cancerous cells, leading to the formation of a type of Appendix Cancer called mucinous adenocarcinoma. By getting tested after noticing certain symptoms, such as bloating, nausea, abdominal pain, and vomiting, you can detect and treat these tumors early with an appendectomy, followed by active surveillance.

Treatment

Physicians, depending on the type and stage of the cancer, recommend various treatments, the most common being surgery. The types of surgery used are:

- Appendectomy - removal of the entire appendix, typically for carcinoid tumors under 2cm.
- Hemicolectomy - removing a portion of the large intestine that is directly above the appendix.
- Cytoreductive surgery - removing the tumor, surrounding fluid, and any affected nearby organs.

How can the Cancer Society help?

The Cancer Society encourages Bahamians to become more proactive with their health, stop ignoring the warning signs, and seek medical help by getting properly screened. The Cancer Society will continue to provide information on our social media platforms, including our weekly newsletter.

At the Cancer Society, we offer the following programs and services for cancer patients:

- Cancer Caring Centre – free accommodations for Family Islanders undergoing cancer treatment in New Providence.
- Adult Support Group – emotional and mental support
- Freedom Kids Club – helps children diagnosed with cancer live normal childhoods by holding events catered to their disease.
- Assist with Port-a-Caths and port needles.

To learn more about what the Cancer Society is doing, subscribe to our newsletter at www.cancersocietybahamas.org/newsletter. Call us at (242) 323-4441 or (242) 325-2483 or email us at admin@cancersocietybahamas.org to become a volunteer, be a spokesperson, and advocate for a healthier Bahamas.

