Appendix Function

The appendix is a small, thin, four-inch tube, situated at the junction of the small intestine and large intestine. This worm shaped appendage is also referred to as vermiform appendix or cecal appendix. Most of us know very little about this small appendage, mainly because we're not sure what role it plays in our body. Vermiform appendix function has always been a mystery to us. However, we've all heard about 'appendicitis', which is the inflammation of the appendix. Scores of people have had their appendix surgically removed due to infection in the same. In fact, due to the trouble and excruciating pain the appendix causes, several people ask why can't they have the appendix removed in advance, in order to prevent any complications in the future.

What is the Function of the Appendix? We don't really think twice before getting an appendectomy (surgical removal of appendix), simply because the appendix has never really been associated with any particular function. Moreover, removing it does not appear to affect the human body in any manner. The function of the appendix of assisting in digestion seems to have disappeared in modern humans. Thus, it has been termed as a vestigial organ, which means though this organ may have had a function, it seems to have lost its original role.

In our primitive ancestors, appendix seemed to play a role in digestion. Some scientists believe that primitive man consumed the barks of trees, which is why an additional organ: appendix, was required to digest the extra roughage. However, this is only speculation. There is no scientific proof to validate this point. Moreover, look at all the stuff people across the globe stuff into their mouths. If this were true, these guys would require two to three additional appendices.

Is the Appendix Non-Functional? Who isn't left in awe at the way the human body has been intelligently geared and wired! Ask any scientist or researcher and they will share how marvelously the human body has been designed. If every part of our body has some or the other role to play, is the appendix placed for decorative purposes? Or did our Maker forget to assign a role to this finger-like organ? Seems unlikely that the appendix was placed without a purpose!

As published in an article, courtesy Scientific American, Loren G. Martin, professor of physiology at Oklahoma State University states that appendix does have a function, despite contrary belief. He says research reveals that the appendix plays a role in the fetal stage. Around the 11th week of development, the appendix in the fetus' body features appearance of endocrine cells. These endocrine cells produce several biogenic amines and peptide hormones, which are compounds assisting homeostatic mechanisms in the fetal body.

As far as adults are concerned, the appendix is believed to play a role in the immune system of the body. Research reveals that the lymphoid tissue begins accumulating in the appendix shortly after birth. This lymphoid tissue accumulation continues and reaches its peak by the time a person reaches his twenties or thirties. This accumulation enables the appendix to act as a lymphoid organ and assists with the maturation of one kind of white blood cells called B lymphocytes. It is also linked to the production of antibodies called immunoglobulin A (IgA). And if this wasn't enough, research also reveals that the appendix is involved in production of molecules, that directly assist in lymphocyte movement to other parts of the human body.

Some other researchers from Duke University Medical School have also found that the appendix produces and protects good bacteria for the gut, thereby acting as a reservoir for good bacteria. If you are aware of the product life cycle, you would know that after a peak comes decline. Similarly, after the peak thirties, lymphoid tissue accumulation decreases rapidly and nearly vanishes by the age of 60. This makes sense because the immune system levels become very weak as old age sets in.

It's simply fascinating to hear that an organ we thought was useless has a function! This discovery took place in the last few years. May be some more uses would be discovered in the future. Let's keep our fingers crossed! However, having said this, it is important for us to not get carried away. Do not cling on to your appendix at all cost, if it's inflamed or infected, just because you heard of the appendix's function. If your healthcare provider has asked you to get an appendectomy done, be obedient and have it removed. Once it gets infected, it only makes sense to have it removed, lest if infects other vital organs. If it isn't removed on time, it can rupture and even prove fatal!

By Priya Johnson
http://www.buzzle.com/articles/appendix-function.html