

"Leave It Alone" Is Best Advice in Appendicitis

THAT IS, IF NO PHYSICIAN IS
HANDY FOR CASE.

By Logan Clendening, M. D.

Every time you cross the ocean the conversation on shipboard veers around to the old subject, what would happen if you got appendicitis and had to be operated on mid-voyage. Of course, there are always competent ship's doctors aboard, but they are not always widely experienced surgeons.

A fellow passenger last summer told me with bated breath, as if I would probably not believe it, how he had treated a traveling companion on his previous voyage. His friend came down with what was undoubtedly appendicitis. The ship's doctor said it was, but did not feel competent to operate. The patient sent for my informant in despair.

"What Shall I Do?"

"What shall I do?" he said. I place myself in your hands."

"I was scared to death and I didn't know what medicines to give him, or what kind of a diet. He couldn't have kept anything on his stomach, anyway. I was frightened to do anything, so I just let him alone. Would you believe it? He was up in three days and put his clothes on and walked off that boat."

"Of course," he added, "he went right to a hospital and had his appendix out. Got along slick, too."

He asked me what I thought of it. I answered that he had probably saved his friend's life. And I was perfectly sincere.

Mostly Get Well.

It is worth remembering that everybody who isn't operated on for appendicitis doesn't die. It is a common question to ask, "What happened to people with appendicitis before the days of aseptic surgery?" And the answer is, "They got well—mostly."

The protective power of the body for infection in the appendix is very great. Provided you do not destroy it by meddlesome treatment. If let alone the intestines will balloon out over the inflamed appendix and, with the help of the omentum (which tends to all infections inside the abdomen), will wall off the inflammation until it subsides. The appendix may even burst and these defenses will keep the pus from spreading widely and finally will absorb it.

Do Not Despair.

A surgeon should, of course, be called and the management of the case left to him. But if no surgeon is available or is a long way off, do not despair.

The thing to do until the surgeon comes is by no means easy. It is "Nothing." This is hard to do when people are sick; the tendency is to "do something." Do nothing. Do not give the patient any food, or any water. Above all, do not give a cathartic. Food, water and especially cathartics make movements throughout the intestines and break the natural defenses of the body down.