

Damon Goes to the Hospital

One morning, Damon woke up with a very upset stomach. He complained to his mom that he didn't feel well, and they both decided that Damon should stay home from school. His parents left him home with some soup to heat up and a variety of juices to choose from when he was thirsty. His mom knew that he was sick, but she thought he was not too sick to stay home alone. After all, Damon was 16 and well able to take care of himself during the day. Damon went back to bed and tried to go back to sleep. He did so for about two hours and then he woke up with a start. He felt really awful. His stomach was really causing him trouble, but he decided to tough it out until his parents came home.

Finally, around three in the afternoon he decided he was more than just a little sick. He called his mom at work. "Mom, I am really sick. I can't keep any food down and my side by my hip bone is very tender. Do you think I might be having an appendix attack?" His mom was immediately concerned. "Hang on, Damon. I will finish up here quickly and be home. Call your dad and tell him we need to get you to the emergency room." Damon called his dad, who immediately came home.

By the time Damon and his parents reached the emergency room, Damon was one sick teenager. The emergency room doctor examined him carefully and announced that she was quite sure that Damon was suffering from appendicitis. The doctor immediately called a team of medical specialists and within 30 minutes, Damon was in surgery.

Damon woke up in a hospital bed. His parents and his little sister, Emma, were sitting quietly in the room, waiting for his first words. Damon said, "I'm thirsty and hungry," but his mom said he couldn't have any food yet. His mom told him that his appendix had been very close to bursting and that his case was more serious than most cases. He would have to stay in the hospital for at least three days so the doctors could be sure he wasn't developing infections or other complications. Unfortunately, within the first two days, Damon developed an infection. Thanks to medication and special care from his doctors, Damon did recover, but the hospital stay stretched into eight days.

Damon did recover but his hospital stay cost over \$55,543, due to the surgery and the treatments he received. Fortunately, Damon's family had health insurance through his mother's job. Monthly, Damon's mother has \$300 deducted from her paycheck and her employer pays the remaining \$700 in premiums to provide health insurance coverage for the entire family. The insurance paid \$50,000 of the bill for Damon's hospital stay, an amount that was more than his mother's pay in a year. Damon's family was still responsible for the other \$5,543 because of deductibles and co-insurance specified in the health insurance policy. The hospital agreed to let the family take a year to pay the bill in payments over the 12 months.

Without the insurance, the family would have had to work with the hospital to begin to pay off the debt over a very long time period. Or, the family might have had to declare bankruptcy to help pay off the large amount debt, which would cost even more money and cause long-term financial damage and stress.

Damon saw his appendicitis attack as an illness that cost about as much as a college education at the local community college. He was very glad to have the medical care but now realizes that he needs to think about health insurance as an important part of adult living. Damon saw all the bills from the doctors, hospital, and pharmacy. The real cost of it all is something he won't forget.