

ABDOMINAL PAIN

Many different disorders, diseases, and problems can cause abdominal pain. The pain can range from very mild to severe and disabling. There are many possible sources of pain in the abdominal area. The abdomen is the area between the bottom of the rib cage and the groin. There are many body organs found here including the liver, gall bladder, and stomach, which lie just below the ribs; the pancreas which is behind the stomach; the intestines, both large and small, in the mid-abdomen; and the kidneys which are located behind the intestines. The lower abdomen holds the bladder, the rectum, and the reproductive organs including, in women, the ovaries, uterus, and cervix. Abdominal pain may be caused by various diseases of any of the organs including infections, *inflammatory conditions* (e.g., appendicitis), ulcers, or tumors; kidney stones or gallstones; urinary tract infections; viruses or parasites in the intestines, food poisoning, pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and other problems with the uterus or ovaries. Menstrual cramps and excess gas are two common causes of abdominal pain. Sometimes abdominal pain can represent referred pain from other parts of the body, for example, a heart attack or pneumonia may be felt as abdominal pain instead of chest pain. Most abdominal pain is minor but some can signal life-threatening illness.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Pain ranging from mild to severe. It may be chronic or acute.
- May be described as cramping, piercing, burning, and sharp, dull, diffuse or in only one area; or radiating to other parts of the abdomen or body.
- It may come and go or it may be constant.
- Depending on the cause, it may be accompanied by diarrhea, bloating, constipation, gas, nausea, vomiting, fever, difficulty urinating, or other symptoms.

What your doctor can do:

- Review your medical history and perform a physical exam.
- Order laboratory blood or urine tests; x-rays or scans; or *endoscopic procedures* (using an endoscope, a narrow, flexible, lighted tube to view internal organs).
- Recommend exploratory surgery in some cases.

What you can do:

- Describe the pain as accurately as possible to help determine the cause.
- Keep a record if possible. Include: time of day when pain starts; when it started and how long it lasts, exactly where it is felt, and the type of pain (sharp, dull, throbbing, burning, radiating, piercing, squeezing, stabbing, tearing, or cramping).
- Also include: when you last ate and what you ate; all related symptoms (nausea, gas), anything that seems to relieve the pain (e.g. walking, laying down, bowel movement); and anything that seems to make it worse, including specific foods or activities.
- Treatment, until diagnosis is made, includes rest and possibly, medication for pain.
- DO NOT take laxatives, painkillers, or other medicine unless instructed by your doctor.
- Reduce activities, keep track of temperature if warm or having chills, and drink plenty of fluids unless instructed otherwise.

Contact your doctor if you are having abdominal pain, if symptoms worsen or change, including developing fever, increased pain, vomiting, weakness, or dizziness.