

ABDOMINAL PAIN

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What are the most common causes of abdominal pain?

Which symptoms of abdominal pain are cause for concern?

How is the cause of abdominal pain determined?

How is abdominal pain treated?



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Abdominal Pain

Just about everybody at one point or another will experience abdominal (belly) pain. Most causes of abdominal pain are not serious and can be readily diagnosed and treated. However, abdominal pain can also be the sign of a serious illness, and it is important that you learn to recognize which symptoms are severe and when to call a doctor.

What are the most common causes of abdominal pain?

Whether it is a mild stomach ache, sharp pain, or stomach cramps, abdominal pain has numerous causes. These include:

- Indigestion
- Constipation
- Stomach flu
- Menstrual cramps
- Food poisoning
- Food allergies
- Gas
- Lactose intolerance
- Ulcers
- Pelvic inflammatory disease
- Hernia
- Gallstones
- Kidney stones

- Endometriosis.
- Crohn's disease
- Urinary tract infections

Which symptoms of abdominal pain are cause for concern?

If your abdominal pain is severe or if it is accompanied by any of the following symptoms, contact your doctor as soon as possible:

- Nausea, fever, or the inability to keep food down for several days
- Bloody stools
- Difficulty breathing
- Vomiting blood
- The pain occurs during pregnancy
- The abdomen is tender to the touch
- Pain is the result of an injury to the abdomen in the previous days
- Pain lasts for several days

These symptoms may be an indication of an internal inflammation, infection, or bleeding that requires treatment as soon as possible. Less commonly, some of these symptoms may be caused by colorectal, ovarian, or abdominal cancer.

How is the cause of abdominal pain determined?

Because there are so many potential causes of abdominal pain, your doctor will perform a thorough physical examination, discuss with you the type of symptoms you are experiencing, and ask you several related questions about the pain you are feeling. These questions could include the following:

- What type of pain are you experiencing?
- Is the pain throughout your abdomen or is it confined to a particular area?
- Is it stabbing and severe? Is it a dull ache?
- Where in your abdomen does the pain seem to be located?
- When does the pain occur? Always? More often in the morning or at night? If the pain comes and goes, about how long does it last each time? Does it occur after eating certain types of foods or after drinking alcohol? During menstruation?
- How long have you had this pain?
- Does the pain also radiate (branch out) into your lower back, shoulder, groin, or buttocks?
- Are you currently taking any medications or herbal supplements?
- Are you pregnant?

- Does any activity such as eating or lying on one side relieve the pain?
- Have you been injured recently?

Once this initial evaluation has been completed, your doctor may have you undergo some tests to help him or her make the diagnosis. These may include blood or urine tests, barium swallows or enemas, an endoscopy, x-ray, or ultrasound.

How is abdominal pain treated?

Treating abdominal pain depends on its cause. Options include:

- Medications for inflammation, gastroesophageal reflux disease, or ulcers;
- Antibiotics for infections;
- Changes in personal behavior for abdominal pain caused by certain foods or beverages; or,
- Local or spinal injections of numbing agents or corticosteroids by pain management physicians.

In more severe cases such as appendicitis and hernia, surgery is necessary.

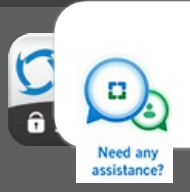
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