

HEALTH IDENTIFIERS & SYMPTOMS OF ILLNESS

ABDOMINAL PAIN

Pain that is in the stomach or belly area is called abdominal pain. Sometimes when it hurts in this area the problem may actually be in your chest or pelvic region. Abdominal pain is also called a belly ache, stomach ache, or abdominal cramps.



SOME FACTS about Abdominal Pain

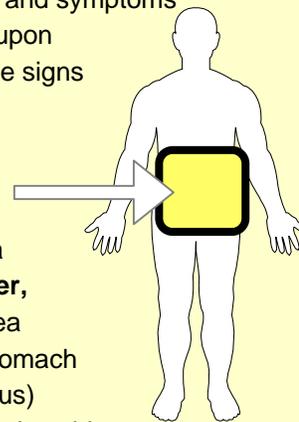
- Abdominal pain is a common problem. Most of the time it will go away without any medical care. Sometimes it is a sign of a very serious condition that can be life-threatening. It all depends upon the cause.
- How much it hurts is not always the most serious symptom. Pain that develops quickly and is localized (remains in the same place) in a small area requires immediate medical attention.
- People with mental retardation cannot always tell you what hurts. You need to look carefully for other signs (such as bending over and crying).
- Individuals with pain will often show changes in behavior.



SIGNS & SYMPTOMS

There are many different signs and symptoms for abdominal pain depending upon what the cause is. Some of the signs include:

- **Pain** in the area below the chest and above the groin (just below waist)
- **Cramps** in the belly area
- **Crying and bending over**, holding onto the belly area
- **Burning** feeling in the stomach or lower throat (esophagus)
- **Lack of appetite** and food avoidance



CAUSES

- **Constipation** or **bowel obstruction** (see Fact Sheet # 3 on Constipation)
- **Stomach flu**
- **Indigestion** and heartburn
- **Food allergies** and **food poisoning**
- **Chronic loose bowel movements** (such as with Irritable bowel syndrome)
- **Injuries**

Other less common causes can include:

- **Medical Illnesses or Conditions:** hernia, ulcers, reflux disease (GERD), heart attack, appendicitis, kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and many other medical diseases.



PREVENTION

- **Diet.** Eat smaller meals more often. Take time eating and don't overeat. Make sure the diet is high in fiber and includes foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grain breads and cereals. Eat less food high in fat, acid and sugar. Avoid foods that are carbonated or gassy.
- **Drink Water.** Drink plenty of liquids such as water and fruit and vegetable juices. Cut back on coffee and drinks high in caffeine or alcohol.
- **Maintain Bowel Movement Routine.** To avoid constipation, do not delay having a bowel movement.
- **Position.** Maintain proper eating position. Don't lay down for at least 30 minutes after a meal. Try not to eat food/fluids at least 2 hours before bedtime. Keep the head elevated when sleeping if ordered by the doctor.

ABDOMINAL PAIN

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WHAT TO DO

- Let the person **rest** until feeling better.
- **Offer water** or other **clear fluids to sip**. Do not give carbonated beverages (soda).
- **Avoid large meals** for about 24 hrs. If the pain goes away, give small amounts of mild food that is not spicy or greasy. Try some crackers, rice, dry toast or applesauce.



WHAT NOT TO DO

- **DO NOT give aspirin** or other pain medicines such as Advil, Motrin or any narcotic pain medicine.
- **DO NOT** prepare foods with a lot of **acid** such as tomatoes, oranges or orange juice. Limit coffee and soda intake.
- **DO NOT eat greasy** or fried foods.
- **DO NOT drink alcoholic** beverages.



DOCUMENT

- Keep a running log and make sure you write down information about the type and location of pain and when it started to share with the doctor.
- File an Incident Report (if required) and complete other documentation such as writing down a description in the logbook if emergency medical care was required.



CALL THE DOCTOR

Call the doctor or the nurse if the pain is persistent (won't go away) or there is abdominal pain and :

- **Bloating** (swelling) for 2 days or more
- **Diarrhea** for more than 3 days
- **Constipation** for more than 3 days
- **Burning** feeling when urinating (pee)
- **Weight loss** or **poor appetite**
- Pain in the **shoulders** and nausea
- Vomiting - **throwing up**
- More **pain when eating** or taking an antacid
- Pain during **menstruation**
- The pain becomes **localized** (very specific area) in the abdomen.



EMERGENCY

Immediately seek medical care if there is:

- **Sudden, severe** and/or **sharp pain**
- **Fever** over 101° F
- **Pain** in the **neck, chest** or **shoulders**
- Throwing up **blood** or blood in the bowel movement
- The abdomen gets **hard and rigid**



TO LEARN MORE - Go to these websites:

- <http://www.webMD.com>
- <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/003120> health.discovery.com/diseasesandcond/encyclopedia/474