



Abdominal Pain

What is abdominal pain?

Abdominal pain is aching or cramping in your belly. The abdomen, or belly, is the area between the chest and the pelvis. The pain can range from mild discomfort to severe pain.

Many things can cause abdominal pain and it can sometimes be hard to know the exact cause of the pain. Examples of some of the common causes of pain in the abdomen are:

- Indigestion or heartburn
- Stomach flu
- Food poisoning
- Food allergy
- Stress and anxiety
- Gastritis (an irritation of the stomach lining)
- Constipation
- Menstruation
- Ulcers
- Hernia
- Urinary tract infection
- Diseases of the intestine
- Pancreatitis
- Liver problems
- Disease or infection in the uterus

Sometimes abdominal pain is caused by a problem in another part of the body, such as the lungs or the heart. For example, a heart attack can cause upper abdominal pain.

You cannot always tell how serious the cause is from the severity of the pain. Mild conditions such as gas or stomach flu may cause severe pain, while more serious problems, such as cancer, may cause relatively mild pain.

What can I expect in the hospital?

You may need to stay in the hospital so your healthcare provider can find the cause of your abdominal pain and treat it. Several things may be done while you are in the hospital to monitor, test, and treat your condition. They include:

Monitoring

- You will be checked often by the hospital staff.
- Your heart rate, blood pressure, and temperature will be checked regularly.
- A heart (cardiac) monitor may be used to check your heartbeat.
- Your blood oxygen level may be monitored by a sensor that is attached to your finger or earlobe.

Testing

Testing may include:

- Blood tests to check for infections or blood loss.
- Tests of bowel movements to check for blood.
- Tests to look for abnormalities in the abdomen, which may include:
 - X-rays: Pictures of the inside of the abdomen to check for causes of the pain.
 - Barium enema: An X-ray taken of your belly after a special dye is inserted through your rectum to show the walls of the intestine and any possible problems.
 - Computed tomography (CT) scan: A series of X-rays taken from different angles and arranged by a computer to show thin cross sections of the abdomen.
 - Ultrasound scan: Sound waves and their echoes are passed through your body from a small device (called a transducer) that is held against your skin to create pictures of the inside of the abdomen.
 - Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI): A powerful magnetic field and radio wave are used to take pictures from different angles to show thin cross sections of the abdomen.
 - Sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy: A test in which a long, flexible tube and tiny camera is put into your rectum and up into the colon to look for causes of the pain. Sometimes one or more pieces of tissue are removed to help make a diagnosis. This is called a biopsy.
 - Laparoscopy: A surgical procedure in which a small cut is made near your bellybutton (navel) and your healthcare provider inserts a lighted tube with a camera through the cut and into your abdomen to look at the organs and pelvic cavity. A biopsy is taken to help make a diagnosis.

Treatment

The treatment for abdominal pain depends on its cause.

- You will have a needle (IV) inserted into a vein in your hand or arm. This will allow for medicine to be given directly into your blood and to give you fluids, if needed.

- You may receive oxygen through a small tube placed under your nose or through a mask placed over your face.
- You may need changes to your diet to prevent irritating the cause of the abdominal pain.
- You may have a tube put through your nose down into your stomach, called a nasogastric or NG tube. The tube may be used to give fluids or medicine, or with suction to help relieve pressure from air or fluids in your stomach and intestine.
- You may need surgery to treat the cause of the pain.
- Your provider may prescribe medicine to:
 - Treat pain
 - Treat or prevent an infection
 - Relieve gas and bloating
 - Reduce the acid in your stomach to help relieve acid indigestion

What can I do to help?

- You will need to tell your healthcare team if you have new or worsening:
 - Abdominal pain that happens along with:
 - Jaw, arm, shoulder, chest, or back pain
 - Sweating
 - Nausea
 - Shortness of breath
 - Anxiety
 - Abdominal pain that goes away and then comes back worse than it was
 - Abdominal pain that:
 - Is steady and sharp
 - Gets worse when you move
 - Feels better when you sit or lean forward
 - Makes you vomit
 - Change in bowel habits, such as pain, mucus, diarrhea, constipation, or other intestinal problems
 - Pain or burning with urination
 - Urgent need to urinate often
 - Signs of infection around your surgical wound if you had surgery. These include:
 - The area around your wound is more red or painful.

- The wound area is very warm to touch.
 - You have blood, pus, or other fluid coming from your wound area.
 - You have chills or muscle aches.
- Ask questions about any medicine or treatment or information that you do not understand.

How long will I be in the hospital?

How long you stay the hospital depends on many factors. The average amount of time to stay in the hospital with abdominal pain is 2 to 3 days.