ABDOMINAL PAIN

Pain in the abdominal area (between the lower ribs and the pelvis) can range from mild to severe and occur suddenly or over time. The following are common causes:

**CONSTIPATION**—Results from not drinking enough fluids, not eating enough dietary fiber, not being active enough, and from missing laxatives. Other symptoms: a hard time passing stool or having very hard stools and a feeling of continued fullness after passing stool. **WHAT TO DO:** Eat foods high in fiber. Drink liquids. Exercise. Don’t resist the urge to have a bowel movement. Discuss use of laxatives, fiber supplements, and laxatives with your health care provider.

**GASTROENTERITIS**—Inflammation of the lining of the stomach and intestines, usually caused by intestinal viruses, food poisoning, and drinking contaminated water or too much alcohol. **Accompanying symptoms:** nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhea, fever and/or chills. (Suspect food poisoning if others who have eaten the same foods you did also have symptoms.) **WHAT TO DO:** Make yourself as comfortable as possible. See a health care provider if symptoms persist or worsen.

**LACTOSE Intolerance**—Results from a lack of an enzyme needed to digest the sugar in dairy products. **Accompanying symptoms:** bloating after drinking milk or eating other dairy products, gas, and diarrhea. **WHAT TO DO:** Avoid foods that are not easy for you to digest. Try foods that have had lactose reduced, such as yogurt and buttermilk. Take over-the-counter drops or pills that have the enzyme lactase when you have dairy foods. If necessary, avoid products with milk.

**MENSTRUAL CRAMPS** (in females)—Caused by hormones influencing the uterus to contract and spasm. Premenstrual bloating may increase the abdominal pain. Other symptoms may include: back pain, fatigue, and/or diarrhea. **WHAT TO DO:** Take an over-the-counter medication for menstrual cramps. Drink hot tea. Hold a heating pad or hot water bottle on your abdomen or lower back. Take a warm bath. Gently massage your abdomen. Do mild exercises. When you can, lie on your back. Rest.

**PEPTIC ULCER**—Usually produces a burning pain between the breastbone and navel. Pain often occurs between meals and in the morning. May last from a few minutes to a few hours and be relieved with eating or antacids. **Accompanying symptoms may include:** loss of appetite, weight loss, nausea or vomiting, dark, red blood or material that looks like coffee grounds, and/or bloody, black tarry stools. **WHAT TO DO:** Avoid repeated use of anti-inflammatory drugs, like aspirin. Talk to your health care provider.

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Abdominal Pain: What Kind of Care Do I Need?

**Is the abdominal pain very severe? Is the pain so bad that you cannot move or get a lot worse when you move?**

**Are all of these symptoms of appendicitis present:** Sharp and severe pain that usually starts in the upper part of the stomach or around the navel and that moves to the lower right part of the abdomen, tenderness when the lower right area of the abdomen is pressed, nausea, vomiting, or no appetite, mild fever?

**For females, do you have the following signs and symptoms of ectopic pregnancy or pelvic inflammatory disease:** you are sexually active, have missed one or more periods or have vaginal bleeding you can’t explain, cramping or pain that can be severe in your lower abdomen, sudden fainting or dizziness

**Do you have signs of an acute kidney infection (fever, shaking and chills, pain in one or both sides of your back, nausea and vomiting)?**

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To Help Ease the Pain:

- Place a hot water bottle or a heating pad, set on low, over the area of pain.
- Find a comfortable position. Relax.

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Do you have any of the following signs of kidney stones: pain that started in your mid back and moved to your abdomen, frequent urination, but a small amount is passed, inability to urinate except in certain positions, bloody urine, chills and/or fever, nausea and vomiting?

With abdominal pain, do you have any of these problems: the whites of your eyes or your skin looks yellow, a recent injury or blow to the abdomen, severe diarrhea, lightheadedness or dizziness, constipation for more than a week, sensitive skin on the abdomen, fever?

With abdominal pain, do you have signs of a bladder infection (see “URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS”)?

With abdominal pain, are any of these conditions present: Constant belching, nausea, gas, or gurgling noises, worsening pain when bending over or lying down, or possible pregnancy?