

FAST FACTS: Abdominal Pain

Abdominal pain is commonly called a belly ache. The source of abdominal pain in older adults can be very difficult to identify. Abdominal pain in older adults is much more likely to be related to serious medical conditions than in adults under 50. Constipation and urinary tract infection (UTI) are the most common sources of abdominal pain in older adults. However, older adults should also be screened for more serious conditions (see below). Due to the vague nature of symptoms that often appear with abdominal pain, misdiagnosis is common and can potentially result in death. Many of the more serious conditions often cause a fever, however it is not uncommon for older adults to have a normal temperature with more serious conditions.



✓ Conditions which cause abdominal pain

- Pancreatitis- Inflammation of the Pancreas
 - Upper abdominal pain/tenderness may radiate to back
 - Pain increases after eating
 - Nausea/vomiting, Weight loss
 - Oily smelling stools
- Cholecystitis- Inflammation of the Gallbladder
 - Upper right abdominal pain/tenderness may radiate to right shoulder
 - Bloating, Nausea/vomiting
 - Fever/chills
- Appendicitis- Inflammation of the Appendix
 - Lower right abdominal pain/tenderness that increases with time & may get worse with movement or coughing
 - Abdominal swelling
 - Nausea/vomiting and loss of appetite
 - Constipation/inability to pass gas
- Gastroenteritis- Intestinal infection also called the “stomach flu”
 - Watery loose stools
 - General abdominal pain and cramping
 - Nausea/vomiting

✓ **Possible Interventions**

- Investigate abdominal pain immediately; delays are most common cause of death.
- Document/ share information about loved one's symptoms with provider
- Pain management focus on treatment of underlying condition
- Opioid analgesics may be ordered to help reduce severe pain
- Non-Drug Treatments include, providing support as need to maintain safety

✓ **What else you can do to help with your Abdominal Pain**

- Write down and share information about your pain with your provider.
- Consider using a Pain Diary to note important information useful to the provider.
- Try a non-drug treatment to decrease your pain, be sure to note on your [Pain Diary](#) the impact of the treatment on your pain.

Revised 3/2020