

## 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
- Analgesics may be ordered to help reduce pain, depending on severity and its impact on function
- Nondrug treatments can be used to assist with pain management

✓ **What Caregivers can do to help their loved one with Abdominal Pain**

- Write down and share information about your loved one's pain with their provider
- Use a [Pain Diary](#) to note important information useful to the provider
- Encourage your loved one to try a non-drug treatment to decrease pain

Revised 3/2020