



ABDOMINAL PAIN

Pain or cramping in the abdominal area

CAUSES

APPENDICITIS

When the appendix becomes inflamed, this results in a condition called *appendicitis*. The appendix, a short blind-ended tube about 7-10 cm. in length, has virtually no use for the body. Made mostly of fat, it is found hanging by the junction of the large and small intestines. Although the exact culprits of appendicitis are unknown, fecal obstruction or intestinal worms are some recognized causes. Surgery to remove an inflamed appendix must be done immediately in order to prevent it from bursting inside the body which may result in infection, other complications, even death.

Symptoms:

- Intense pain that begins above the belly button and travels to the lower right abdomen
- Pain worsens with movement, deep breaths, coughing or sneezing
- Appetite loss
- Fever, nausea, vomiting

DO:

- Be aware and monitor symptoms. This will help in identifying the illness.
- Seek help and go to a hospital. Appendicitis is a condition that requires immediate attention and surgery.

DON'T:

- Don't take laxatives as this could worsen the condition.
- Don't take pain relievers as this may disguise some of the symptoms that are crucial to correct diagnosis.
- If you are a bystander, refrain from giving any food or drink to the patient since he may require immediate surgery.

GASTROENTERITIS

Gastroenteritis is the inflammation of the stomach and the intestines. The most common form in children and young adults is that of *viral gastroenteritis*. This condition normally passes within 24 hours. However, it can last as long as five days. There is no cure for viral gastroenteritis. However, miserable as it seems, it will eventually pass.

Symptoms:

- Abdominal cramping
- Diarrhea
- Fever and weakness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Blurred or double vision
- Difficulty in speaking and swallowing

DO:

- Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration especially among children.
- Take the BRAT diet – bananas, rice, applesauce or toast in small amounts will help.
- Make sure that food is handled and prepared properly. Keep foods at their ideal temperatures. Cook meat products thoroughly and avoid placing other food items where raw meat has been.
- Keep hands clean especially when cooking.

DON'T:

- Don't drink alcohol, soda, or any other caffeinated drinks. Ginger ale or decaffeinated tea is advisable.
- Don't try to eat a regular meal especially after vomiting. Eat small amounts of food except spicy or fatty treats during a gastroenteritis attack.



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DYSMENORRHEA

Menstrual cramps, also known as dysmenorrhea, are characterized by pain in the abdomen during a woman's menstrual period. It is caused by an excess of *prostaglandin*, a chemical that causes the uterus to contract. This condition is attributed to hormonal imbalances that occur during menstruation. However, if the pain experienced is severe and there is too much menstrual bleeding, it is most likely a sign of an underlying medical condition and help must be sought.

Symptoms:

- Mild to severe cramps
- Headache
- Pain in the thighs, hips or back
- Nausea and vomiting
- Fainting, in some cases

DO:

- Apply heat to the affected area. Try using a hot water bottle or a towel soaked in warm water.
- Drink lots of water and juice.
- Try over-the-counter pain relievers such as ibuprofen.
- Get regular exercise. Walking, jogging, and aerobics are recommended activities.

DON'T:

- Don't drink alcohol if you are having a menstrual cramp.



Regular exercise like jogging helps prevent menstrual cramps.

FEMALE REPRODUCTIVE CONCERNS

Abdominal cramping and pain are symptoms of a number of female reproductive concerns. Some abdominal pain is felt by women who are pregnant. However, if this is experienced with vaginal bleeding, it may signal a miscarriage or ectopic pregnancy. If a woman who is not pregnant experiences cramping, pain, heavy vaginal discharge, and irregular menstrual bleeding, she may have a pelvic inflammatory disease or a similar condition. In all cases mentioned, help must be sought in order to determine the treatment required.

Symptoms:

- Pain or cramping in the abdominal area
- Vaginal discharge or bleeding

DO:

- Apply a hot compress to the abdomen to help relieve the cramping.
- In case you are bleeding heavily, relax and lie down. Slightly elevate your feet.
- Seek help if there is bleeding or if the abdominal pain is unbearable.

DON'T:

- If you are pregnant, don't overexert yourself, especially if you have a history of miscarriage.

IRRITABLE BOWEL SYNDROME

See page 126.