

MCLA Health Services

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Self Care Sheet

Abdominal Pain

Abdominal pain refers to any pain of discomfort in the abdomen, the area of the body from the lower ribs to the pelvis involving the organs in that area: stomach, colon, intestines, liver, spleen, pancreas, gallbladder and appendix or unrelated organs (uterus, ovaries, lower lungs or kidneys). Everyone experiences abdominal pain from time to time. The pain can be mild or severe, may be continuous or come and go. Abdominal pain can be short lived or occur over weeks or months. Abdominal pain is a symptom caused by a variety of problems like constipation, gas, intolerance to certain foods (dairy products) or viral infections like the flu. Abdominal pain can also indicate other problems like a bladder infection, menstrual cramps, ovarian cysts, appendicitis, gall bladder or bowel problems. Finding the cause may take several visits with a medical professional.

Home Care and Prevention

- ⇒ Take any prescribed or over-the-counter medications as directed by health care professionals.
- ⇒ Keep all follow up appointments with medical professionals.
- ⇒ Rest as needed.
- ⇒ Become aware of what activities or foods might worsen or cause your symptoms and limit them.
- ⇒ Avoid caffeine, smoking and overindulgence of alcohol.
- ⇒ If having nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea avoid solid foods, take ice chips and when the vomiting stops take small frequent amounts of clear liquids such as tea, ginger ale, broth or Gatorade. Stay hydrated. If vomiting recurs wait 1-2 hours before trying clear liquids again.
- ⇒ If you are experiencing heartburn avoid spicy, acidic and fatty foods. Limit coffee, tea, alcohol and soda, eat smaller meals and avoid bedtime snacks. Try an antacid like TUMS or Mylanta.
- ⇒ For menstrual cramping try ibuprofen (Advil or Motrin) and a heating pad to the abdomen.

How do I know if the abdominal pain is severe?

- ⇒ If your pain is so severe you can not move without causing pain, you can not sit still or find a comfortable position.
- ⇒ If you are experiencing fever.
- ⇒ If you have blood in your stool or urine. If you are vomiting blood or something that looks like coffee grounds.
- ⇒ If your vomiting is continuous, more than 3 times an hour for 3 or more hours. Or if your diarrhea lasts more than 12 hours.
- ⇒ If you have signs of dehydration (dry parched lips, dry skin, extreme thirst, dizziness, lack of urination).
- ⇒ If you are pregnant or think you are pregnant.

Follow up at Health Services for further evaluation and treatment. Any concern for severe abdominal pain should seek more immediate medical attention.