

ABDOMINAL PAIN / "BELLY ACHE"

Abdominal pain or a "belly ache" can be a sign of a minor temporary illness like a virus or it can be a serious problem like a blockage of the intestines. A person's report of pain should always be taken seriously. Your observations will be helpful in identifying the underlying cause of the pain.

Other considerations when someone has abdominal pain:

Has this person had this before?

1. If "yes", what caused it?
2. If "yes", how was it treated?
3. If "yes", did the treatment work?

How bad is the pain?

1. Can the person participate in their usual activity?
2. Has the pain made this person stop what they are doing?

Could this be constipation?

1. When was the last bowel movement?
2. Are there other symptoms of constipation (dry, hard stools) or diarrhea (loose, frequent stools)?

Where is the pain?

1. Can the person describe where the pain is?
2. Can the person point to where the pain is?
3. Is the pain only in one area?
4. Is the pain moving all over the abdomen?

What is the pain like?

1. Is it sharp?
2. Is it dull?
3. Is it constant?
4. Is it intermittent?

If the person cannot tell you about the pain or show you:

1. Is the person constantly moving around, holding their abdomen?
2. Does the person stop moving and relax for a while and then start moving again?
3. Is the person lying down with their knees drawn up?
4. Does the person have a pained expression on their face?
5. Is the person moaning or crying?
6. Will the person let you touch their abdomen?
7. If they let you touch their abdomen does the pain seem to get worse when you do?

What about food?

1. Is the person refusing to eat or drink?
2. Does the pain seem better or worse after they eat?
3. Do they have the pain after eating a particular food?
4. Has the person vomited?
5. If they have vomited, how much?
6. If they have vomited, what did it look like?

Other symptoms:

1. Does the person have a fever?
2. Does the person have difficulty breathing?

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

Call 911 if:

- The person appears very ill
- Symptoms developed very suddenly and are significant enough to stop normal activity.
- The person has difficulty breathing

If you think that there may be a health problem:

- Call or talk to your nurse or supervisor according to your agency's policy
- If you think they are ill, call the doctor
- Talk to other staff about what you see
- Document what you see and what you have done to address the pain

