

ABDOMINAL PAIN

Abdominal pain is a common reason for people to attend the Emergency Department.

Abdominal pain can come from many parts of the body – the stomach, liver, kidneys and bladder, pancreas, small and large bowel, and reproductive organs. Abdominal pain can also be caused by the lungs and heart, skin and muscles.

There are therefore many causes of abdominal pain, some serious and some not. Because there are so many possible causes, in the emergency department our aim is to rule-out or exclude the serious causes of abdominal pain.

This means that we may not find the cause today but we will decide whether it is serious enough that you need to stay in hospital for further tests or treatment, or if it is safe for you to go home.

The most common serious causes that we look for are:

- Things that need surgery today: eg appendicitis, perforated bowel or stomach, gall bladder infection
- Gynaecological causes: eg ectopic pregnancy, miscarriage, pelvic infection
- Other causes that may need specific treatments: eg kidney stones, gallstones, pancreatitis, bladder infections, and others

The tests that we use to look for these are:

- Examination – Often the most useful test is the doctor's examination of your abdomen
- Blood tests
- Urine tests
- Pregnancy test
- ECG
- In some cases, xrays, ultrasound and CT scan

If the tests are normal, and your doctor is not concerned about other serious causes, you will be discharged home. **This does not mean that there is nothing wrong – it means that it is safe to go home and have any further tests by your local doctor.**

If you are discharged home without a diagnosis, there are three things that might happen to your pain ... it might

- 1) Go away ... no more medical help will be needed
- 2) Stay the same ... you should see your local doctor if it does not settle by a few days
- 3) Get worse or change ... you should come back to hospital or see your doctor. Something may have changed, and further examination and tests may show us more clearly what it is.