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APPROACH TO PATIENT • Updated 22 May 2025

Acute Abdominal Pain in Adults - Approach to the Patient

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Overview and Recommendations

Acute abdominal pain (persisting 5 to 7 days) is common, and although most patients have a benign and/or self-limited etiology, the initial goal of evaluation is to identify those patients with a serious etiology that may require urgent intervention.

Clinical Presentation

- The [clinical presentation](#) may vary by the [underlying cause](#) and can range from a benign and self-limited disease to an emergency condition requiring urgent surgical intervention.
 - The [location of pain](#) may vary by the affected organ or intra-abdominal structures.
 - Pain from foregut structures, including the stomach, pancreas, liver, biliary system, and proximal duodenum, usually localizes to the epigastrium or right upper quadrant.
 - Pain from midgut structures, the small bowel and proximal one-third of the colon, including the appendix, usually localizes to the periumbilical region.

Images

Produced in collaboration with American College of Physicians

[Cullen and Grey Turner signs in acute pancreatitis](#)

Algorithms

[Acute abdominal pain in adults initial clinical diagnosis algorithm \[PDF\]](#)

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- Algorithms = flowdiagram

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