

# Chapter 21

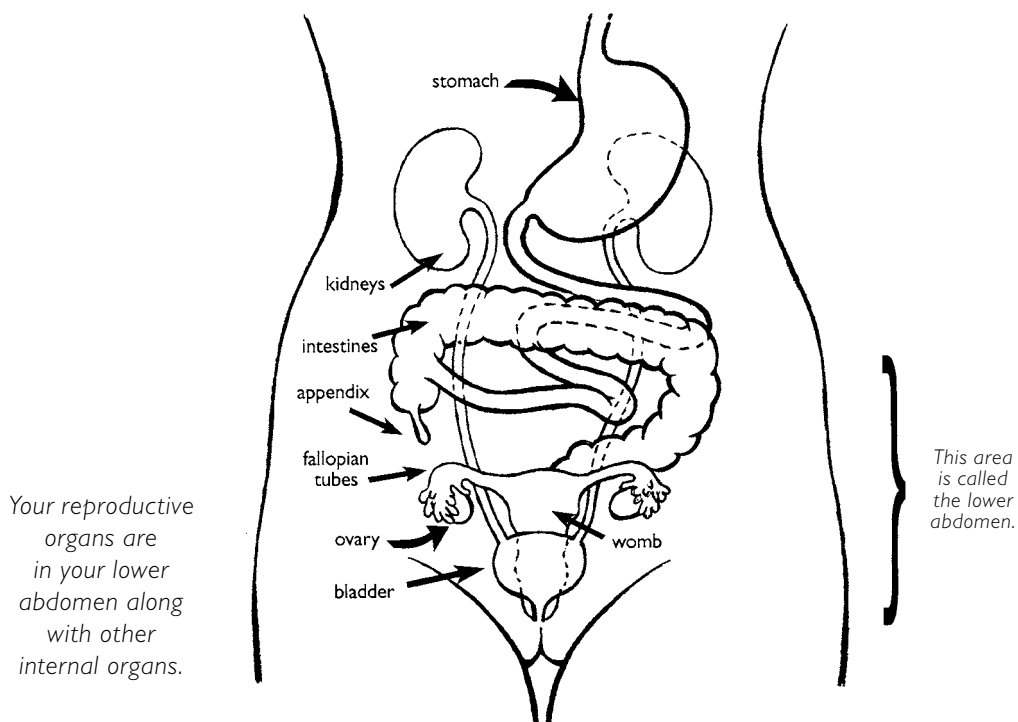
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## How to use this chapter:

1. For sudden, severe pain in the belly or abdomen, see page 354 and follow that advice.
2. Look up the different kinds of pain on pages 354 to 356. Most of these problems are described in other parts of the book. Turn to the page listed for more information.
3. If you are still unsure of the cause of the pain, look at the questions on page 357.
4. For information on how to examine someone with pain in the abdomen, see page 534.

# Pain in the Lower Abdomen



**M**ost of us will have pain in the lower belly or abdomen at some time in our lives. Often women are taught that such pain is normal and should be endured in silence. Some people think that a woman's pain is not serious until it affects standing, walking, or talking. But if we wait too long to seek care for pain, the result could be serious—*infection, infertility, loss of a pregnancy, and even death.*

This chapter describes different kinds of pain in the lower abdomen (below the *navel*) and what might be causing the pain. Some pain in the lower abdomen spreads above the navel and could have other causes. Some problems of the lower abdomen will also cause pain in the low back. If the pain seems different from what is described in this chapter, see a health worker trained to give an abdominal exam.

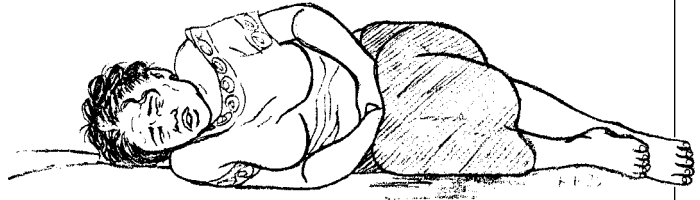
► *Pain should not be a normal part of our lives—it is a sign that something is wrong. Seek care before you are so ill that you cannot stand, walk, or talk.*

## Sudden, Severe Pain in the Abdomen

Some lower abdominal pain is an emergency. If you have any of the following danger signs, go to the nearest hospital. A trained health worker will need to do an examination of your abdomen, a pelvic exam, and perhaps special tests. For information about how to do an abdominal exam and a pelvic exam, see pages 534 to 538.

### Danger signs:

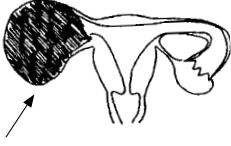
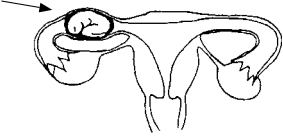
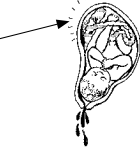


- sudden, severe pain in the abdomen
- high fever
- nausea and vomiting
- swollen abdomen (it feels hard, like wood)
- silent abdomen (no noises)

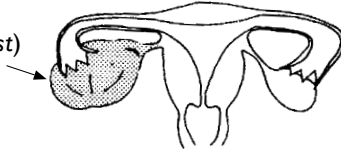
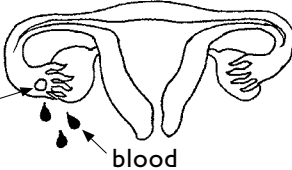
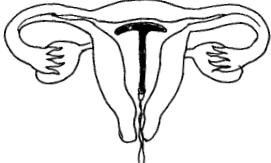


## Kinds of Pain in the Lower Abdomen

Pain in the lower abdomen can have many causes. It can be difficult to find the cause because there are many organs in the abdomen very close together.

Kind of pain	May be caused by...	What to do	See page
Severe, unusual pain during a menstrual period or after a period was missed	<p>pregnancy in the tube</p>	URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.	73
Ongoing pain during periods	<p>fibroids</p>	See "Pain during your period," and "Problems of the womb."  Use a mild pain medicine.	50 380 482
Cramps during periods	normal squeezing of the womb. Some kinds of intrauterine devices (IUDs) may make the pain worse during their first months of use.	See "Pain during your period."	50
If period is late	<p>miscarriage</p>	If pain becomes severe, go to a hospital.	234

Kind of pain	May be caused by...	What to do	See page
Pain after childbirth, miscarriage, or abortion	infection from pieces of afterbirth ( <i>placenta</i> ) left in the womb or <i>germs</i> that got into the womb during the birth or abortion	See “Womb infection,” and “Infection after abortion.”	97 255
<p>Severe pain with or without fever (infection)</p> <p>with or after having a <i>sexually transmitted infection</i> or pelvic infection</p> <p>on one side of the abdomen, with or without fever, <i>nausea</i>, <i>vomiting</i>, and no appetite</p>	 <p>another pelvic infection, or a pocket of <i>pus</i> in the abdomen (<i>pelvic abscess</i>)</p> <p><i>appendicitis</i> or other <i>intestinal</i> infection</p> <p><i>kidney</i> infection</p>	<p>URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.</p> <p>URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.</p> <p>See “Bladder and kidney infections.”</p>	276 366
Pain with <i>diarrhea</i>	intestinal infection from <i>bacteria</i> or <i>parasites</i>	See “Diarrhea.”	298
Severe pain in the first 3 months of pregnancy, often with bleeding that comes and goes	<p>pregnancy in the tube</p> 	URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.	73
Severe pain in the last 3 months of pregnancy, with or without bleeding	<p>placenta has pulled away from the wall of the womb</p> 	URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.	73
Mild, occasional pain during pregnancy	muscle cramps or weight of pregnancy, probably normal	No treatment needed.	
<p>Pain with frequent or painful urination</p> <p>Pain with blood in the urine</p>	<p><i>bladder</i> or <i>kidney</i> infection</p> <p><i>kidney</i> stone</p> 	<p>See “Bladder and kidney infections.”</p> <p>See “Kidney or bladder stones.”</p>	366 369
Pain with <i>discharge</i> or light bleeding from the vagina, sometimes with fever	 <p>pelvic infection, which may be caused by a <i>sexually transmitted infection (STI)</i> or by infection after miscarriage, abortion, or childbirth</p>	<p>See “Pelvic inflammatory disease,” “Womb infection,” and “Infection after abortion.”</p>	276 97 255

Kind of pain	May be caused by...	What to do	See page
Pain during sex	<p>pelvic inflammatory disease (PID), or scars from an old pelvic infection</p> <p>a growth on an ovary (ovarian cyst)</p>  <p>fibroids</p> <p>unwanted sex</p>	<p>See "PID."</p> <p>See "Cysts on the ovaries."</p> <p>See "Common growths on the womb."</p> <p>See "If sex is painful."</p>	<p>276</p> <p>383</p> <p>380</p> <p>189</p>
Pain when moving, walking, or lifting	old pelvic infection or any of the reasons listed above	Use mild pain medicine if needed.	482
Pain that lasts only a few hours in the middle of your menstrual cycle	<p>increased squeezing of the muscles in the ovary just before it releases an egg (ovulation)</p>  <p>blood</p>	<p>Use mild pain medicine if needed.</p> <p>See Chapter 4, "Our Reproductive Bodies."</p>	<p>482</p> <p>43</p>
Pain within 3 weeks of getting an intra-uterine device (IUD)	<p>infection with an IUD, which is most common soon after the IUD is put in</p> 	See a health worker right away.	215
Pain without other signs	<p>pelvic infections, which can cause constant or on-and-off pain in the abdomen or lower back that lasts for months or years</p> <p>intestinal infection from bacteria or parasites</p> <p>tumor or growth on the womb or ovary</p>	<p>See a health worker trained to do a pelvic exam.</p> <p>See a health worker or <i>Where There Is No Doctor</i>.</p> <p>See a health worker trained to do a pelvic exam. See Chapter 24, "Cancer and Growths."</p>	<p>276</p> <p>375</p>

If your pain does not fit one of the kinds described on the previous pages, these questions may help to learn more about it.

**What is the pain like? Is it sharp and severe—or dull, achy, and not so bad? Does it come and go, or is it constant?**

- Terrible pain that comes and goes could be from a kidney stone. Severe grabbing, clenching, or cramping pain could be from an intestinal problem.
- Sharp, severe pain, especially just in one place, could be appendicitis or a pregnancy outside the womb in the tube.

**How long has the pain lasted?**

- Sudden, severe pain that does not get better is probably serious. It could be from a pregnancy in the tube, appendicitis or other gut problems, something wrong with the ovary, or pelvic inflammatory disease (PID).
- Pain that lasts for many days or weeks, especially if it is not severe, may be caused by scars from an old infection, indigestion, or nerves. It may be possible to treat this at home.

**Does the pain affect your hunger?**

- If you have pain in the abdomen and you **DO NOT** want to eat anything, you may have a serious infection in your intestines, or appendicitis.
- If you have pain and you **DO** feel like eating, you probably do not have one of these problems.

For more information on pain in the lower abdomen, see *Where There Is No Doctor* or another general medical book.

## Questions about Pain in the Abdomen

*Yuni, go to the clinic today to see about this pain you are having. It will only get worse.*



*A woman who wakes with pain today could die from it tomorrow. Get help early, even if you are not sure it is serious.*