

Acute Abdomen

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Objectives

- Define acute abdomen
- Describe a general approach to acute abdomen
- Discuss common causes of acute abdomen through case scenarios

Definition

Acute abdomen denotes any sudden, spontaneous, non-traumatic disorder in the abdominal area that requires urgent surgery in some cases

General Approach to Acute Abdomen

- **Subjective – History Taking**
- **Objective – Physical Examination**
- **Assessment – Investigations**
- **Plan – Treatment**

History

- Age
- Pain (SOCRATES)
- Vomiting
- Defecation
- Fever
- Past history

Physical Examination

- General Look
- Vital Signs
- Head & Neck
- Chest
- Abdomen
- Rectal Examination
- Vaginal Examination

Investigations

- Complete Blood Count
- Electrolytes, BUN, Creatinine
- LFTs
- Serum Amylase
- Lactate
- ABGs
- CXR
- AXR – KUB
- Abdominal Ultrasound
- Abdominal CT
- Angiography / Duplex Scanning

Diagnosis

- Acute Abdomen + Shock – Acute Pancreatitis/ Ruptured AAA
- Generalized Peritonitis – Ruptured Viscus
- Localized Peritonitis - Acute Appendicitis
- Bowel Obstruction
- Medical Causes (Lobar Pneumonia, Acute Inferior MI)

Management

- Immediate operation – Ruptured AAA
- Preoperative preparation and urgent operation within 6 hours
- Urgent operation within 24 hours
- Conservative treatment
- Observation
- Discharge

Scenario 1

A 35 year-old male presented to the ER with 2 days history of abdominal pain. He took antacids but did not help him at all!

S -

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Scenario 2

A 55 year-old business man presented to the ER with severe abdominal pain since 6 hours when he felt something like a burst in his abdomen. He is known with PUD and H-pylori but he was not taking his medications regularly.

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Scenario 3

A 73 year-old male developed atrial fibrillation while recovering from an acute MI in the medical ward. The surgery team was consulted to evaluate a new onset of severe mid-abdominal pain.

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Scenario 4

A 54 year-old lady presented to the ER complaining of generalized abdominal pain associated with vomiting, constipation for 2 days, and abdominal distention. She had an emergency Cesarean Section for her 5th baby 5 years back.

S -

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Questions

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Summary

- Acute abdomen is a sudden abdominal disorder that requires an urgent operative intervention in some cases
- Almost all acute abdominal events have a common general surgical approach based on the mnemonic SOAP
- We have applied this general approach to some case scenarios such as acute appendicitis, perforated DU, acute mesenteric ischemia, and small bowel obstruction