Most abdominal pain is not serious, although it can be extremely uncomfortable. Diarrhea, constipation, and excessive gas are common causes of abdominal pain.

Fortunately, these conditions can be treated at home using simple self-care techniques. Treatment depends on which of these conditions you are experiencing.

**Signs & Symptoms**

Oftentimes, the symptoms of diarrhea, constipation, and gas can be similar, and may even be experienced together. Take a closer look at the symptoms outlined here to determine which condition you may be experiencing.

**Diarrhea**
- More than three or four loose, watery stools per day
- Cramping or pain in the abdomen
- Bloating

**Constipation**
- Difficulty passing stools
- Firm, hard bowel movements
- Cramping and pain in the rectum

**Gas**
- Rumbling in the stomach
- Excessive flatulence (more than 20 per day)
- Inability to pass gas
- Bloating

Home treatment for most abdominal pain is relatively straightforward, and most often involves taking an over-the-counter medication to relieve symptoms.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

I hear that a normal person has a bowel movement at least once a day. Is this true?
- No. In fact, anywhere from three times a day to three times a week is considered “normal.” What you should be most concerned with is what is most normal for you. Your bowel frequency may change slightly from time to time, which is nothing to worry about. Drastic changes, however, may be cause to seek medical advice.

What’s the best way to prevent gas?
- There’s no single way to prevent gas altogether, but paying close attention to what you eat, and how your body reacts to it, is a good first step. Watch also what you drink. Carbonated drinks such as soda and beer can cause gas. Be sure to get plenty of exercise, as this will help your body eliminate gas in a healthy, natural way.
**Home Treatment**
Home treatment for most abdominal pain is relatively straightforward, and most often involves taking an over-the-counter medication to relieve symptoms.

**Diarrhea**
- Drink eight, 8 oz. glasses of water or other clear fluids such as clear soda, juices, or tea each day.
- As your diarrhea clears, add semisolid and low-fiber foods to your diet.
- Avoid dairy products, fatty, or seasoned foods. Stay away from caffeine and nicotine.
- Try an over-the-counter medication such as Pepto-Bismol or Imodium.

**Constipation**
- Eat on a regular schedule if possible, and consume more high-fiber foods such as fruits and vegetables.
- Drink eight, 8 oz. glasses of water or other clear fluids such as clear soda, juices, or tea each day.
- Increase your level of physical activity.
- If necessary, try a laxative such as Metamucil or Milk of Magnesia. (Be sure to follow label directions as excessive use of laxatives can actually be harmful and make your constipation worse.)

**Gas**
- Avoid eating spicy or fatty foods.
- Eat slowly, and avoid excessive air intake.
- Cut down on carbonated drinks and beer.
- Avoid lying down immediately after eating.
- Increase your level of physical activity.
- Try an over-the-counter medication such as Gas-X to relieve symptoms.

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**IS YOUR STOMACH PAIN APPENDICITIS?**
Appendicitis is an inflammation of the appendix, a small, hollow sac attached to the large intestine. The appendix is located in the lower right area of the abdomen. Fortunately, a very specific sequence of events will usually occur if you have appendicitis.

If appendicitis is the cause of your pain, the first symptom you will most likely experience is pain near the belly button or just below the breastbone. Next, you may experience nausea and vomiting. You may also lose your appetite. The third symptom you will most likely experience with appendicitis is pain in the lower, right corner of your abdomen. Finally, you will experience a fever between 100°F and 102°F.

Remember, these are the classic signs and symptoms of appendicitis—if you suspect you have appendicitis, contact your healthcare provider right away.

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**WHEN TO SEEK CARE**
Most abdominal pain is more of an annoyance than a serious medical condition. However, there are times when your condition may indicate the presence of a more serious health problem. Seek medical attention if you’re experiencing any of the following symptoms.

**Diarrhea**
- If you have diarrhea that lasts longer than one week
- If you become dehydrated—symptoms include little or no urination, weakness or dizziness, and an excessively dry mouth
- If stools are bloody
- If you have a fever of 101.5°F or higher with diarrhea

**Constipation**
- If stools are thin and pencil-like (can indicate the presence of a tumor in the lower bowel)
- If your constipation lasts longer than three weeks
- If stools are bloody
- If you are reliant on laxatives for bowel movements

**Gas**
- If your gas is accompanied by crushing or squeezing chest pain (possible sign of a heart attack)
- If gas is associated with pain that spreads to the upper abdomen, back, jaw, or arms (possible sign of a heart attack)
- If your gas is accompanied by severe, steady pain in the upper abdomen
About Nausea & Vomiting

Two uncomfortable feelings in life are nausea and vomiting. Nausea is an unpleasant, churning sensation felt down inside the stomach, whereas vomiting is the expulsion of stomach contents through the esophagus and out of the mouth. Oftentimes, vomiting is preceded and even caused by an intense feeling of nausea.

Vomiting and nausea, though not diseases in and of themselves, often indicate the presence of a common viral infection—known as gastroenteritis—in the intestines. Other causes of nausea and vomiting may include adverse reactions to certain medications, food poisoning, pregnancy, and motion sickness.

If not cared for properly, nausea and vomiting can lead to other complications that include dehydration (lack of water in the body), aspiration (food lodged in the windpipe), or even serious damage to your body including tearing of the food pipe. The rest of this section is dedicated to helping you treat and manage bouts of nausea and vomiting.

Each year, 76 million cases of food-borne illness are reported, and 325,000 people are hospitalized due to tainted food.
The signs and symptoms of nausea and vomiting are easy to identify. Often a nauseated person will feel the following symptoms.

- Fatigue
- A warm or sweaty feeling
- Excessive saliva in the mouth

While nausea and vomiting are usually symptoms of other medical conditions, there are a number of triggers that can make a person feel nauseous or vomit:

- Gastroenteritis (a common viral condition passed easily from person to person)
- Adverse reactions to medications
- Excessive consumption of alcohol
- Colds and flu
- Food poisoning
- Overeating
- Motion sickness
- Bad smells
- Migraine headaches

Home Treatment

Treating nausea and vomiting in your home can be simple and effective. The following remedies can help calm your stomach, and help you feel better quickly.

- Refrain from eating or drinking for several hours. (You may attempt to eat small amounts of bland food like dry toast, water, crackers and rice.)
- Drink cool, clear fluids to prevent dehydration.
- Avoid fatty, fried, or spicy foods as well as dairy items. Also avoid alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine.
- Drink small amounts of sugared soda (sugar can help calm the stomach).

The information contained in this medical self-care newsletter can be used to increase your personal awareness of how to manage minor health issues. If you have any questions or concerns about medical issues impacting you or your family, always contact your health care provider.