

# Chapter 21

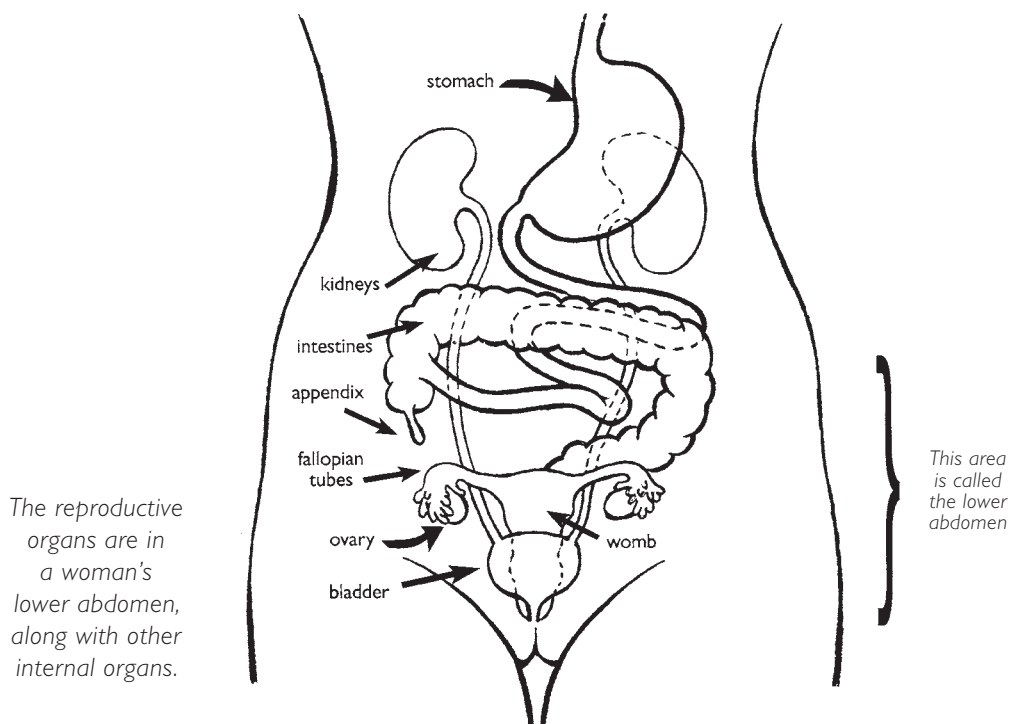
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## How to use this chapter:

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 a woman with pain in the abdomen, see page 534.

# Pain in the Lower Abdomen



**M**ost women have pain in the lower belly or abdomen at some time in their lives. Often women are taught that this pain is normal for them, and that they should endure such pain in silence. Some people think that a woman's pain is not serious until she cannot stand, walk or talk. But when a woman waits that 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.

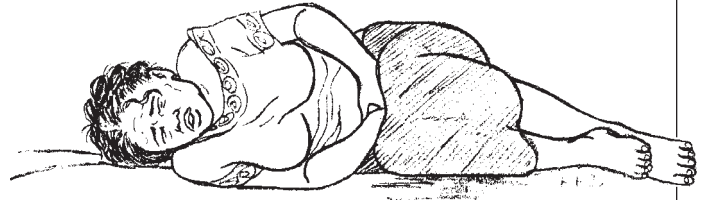
► *Pain should not be a normal part of a woman's life—it is a sign that something is wrong. Seek care before you are so ill that you cannot stand, walk, or talk.*

## 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 page 534.

**Danger signs:**

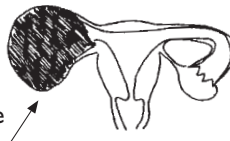
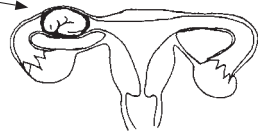



- sudden, severe pain in the abdomen
- high fever
- nausea and vomiting
- swollen abdomen, which is hard like a piece of wood
- silent abdomen (no noises)

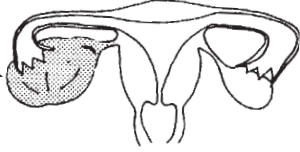
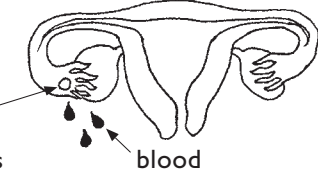
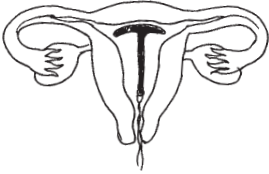


## Kinds of Pain in the Lower Abdomen

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

| Kind of pain                                                                        | May be caused by                                                                                                 | What to do                                                                                     | See page         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Severe, unusual pain during monthly bleeding or after a monthly bleeding was missed | <p><i>pregnancy in the tube</i></p>                                                                              | URGENT! Go to a hospital right away.                                                           | 73               |
| Ongoing pain during monthly bleeding                                                | <p><i>fibroids</i></p>                                                                                           | See 'pain with monthly bleeding', and 'problems of the womb'.<br><br>Use a mild pain medicine. | 50<br>380<br>482 |
| Cramps during monthly bleeding                                                      | normal squeezing of the <i>womb</i> . Some kinds of <i>intra-uterine devices (IUDs)</i> may make the pain worse. | See 'pain with monthly bleeding'.                                                              | 50               |
| If the monthly bleeding is late                                                     | <p><i>miscarriage</i></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 (placenta) 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<br>255                    |
| <p>Severe pain with or without <i>fever</i> (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 (pelvic abscess)</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> | <p>274</p> <p>366</p>        |
| 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                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | 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>                                                 | <p>366</p> <p>369</p>        |
| Pain with <i>discharge</i> or light bleeding from the <i>vagina</i> , sometimes with fever                                                                                                                                                                    |  <p>pelvic infection which may be caused by a sexually transmitted infection (STI), or by infection after miscarriage, <i>abortion</i>, or childbirth</p>                                | <p>See 'pelvic inflammatory disease', 'womb infection', and 'infection after abortion'.</p>                                        | <p>274</p> <p>97<br/>255</p> |

| Kind of pain                                                                       | May be caused by                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | What to do                                                                                                                                                                     | See page                                    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| <p>Pain during sex</p>                                                             | <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 'problems of the ovaries'.</p> <p>See 'problems of the womb'.</p> <p>See 'if sex is painful'.</p>                                                     | <p>274</p> <p>383</p> <p>380</p> <p>189</p> |
| <p>Pain when moving, walking, or lifting</p>                                       | <p>old pelvic infection, or any of the reasons listed above</p>                                                                                                                                                                                  | <p>Use mild pain medicine if needed.</p>                                                                                                                                       | <p>482</p>                                  |
| <p>Pain that lasts only a few hours in the middle of your <i>monthly cycle</i></p> | <p>the lining of the abdomen gets irritated when the ovary releases an egg (ovulation) because there is a small amount of blood</p>                             | <p>Use mild pain medicine if needed.</p> <p>See the chapter on "Understanding Our Bodies."</p>                                                                                 | <p>482</p> <p>43</p>                        |
| <p>Pain within 3 weeks of getting an intra-uterine device (IUD)</p>                | <p>infection with an IUD is most common soon after the IUD is put in</p>                                                                                      | <p>See a health worker right away.</p>                                                                                                                                         | <p>216</p>                                  |
| <p>Pain without other signs</p>                                                    | <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.</p> | <p>274</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 walks with pain today could die from it tomorrow. Get help early if you are not sure.*