

Your Pathway for Managing Chronic Abdominal Pain (adults)

What is chronic abdominal pain?

- Means belly pain that is troublesome, is present every day (or almost every day) for months, and is not explained by other medical conditions.
- The cause of chronic abdominal pain can be challenging to determine and treat.
- Treatments focusing on improving your symptoms are usually all that is needed.
- It can affect your every day activities and have a negative impact on quality of life.
- Usually cared for by healthcare providers in your family doctor's office.

What is the chronic abdominal pain patient pathway?

It is a map for you and your healthcare providers to follow. It makes sure the care you are getting for chronic abdominal pain is safe and helpful in managing your symptoms.

You and your healthcare providers may modify the pathway to best suit your healthcare needs.

If symptoms cannot be managed over time, you and your healthcare providers may decide a referral to a specialist would be helpful.

1. Check your symptoms

Do you have the following symptoms for at least 3 of the last 6 months?

- Pain or discomfort that is present every day or almost every day
- Pain that impacts your every day activities (e.g. work, sex, leisure activities, family life, ability to care for yourself or others)
- No other medical conditions that might explain your abdominal pain

2. Make lifestyle changes to manage your symptoms (see over for details)

- Identify what causes you stress and seek ways to manage it
- Try to get at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily. Aim for 150 minutes each week
- Identify foods that cause symptoms and try to limit or avoid them

3. Tests that may be done

- Blood and stool tests
- Urine tests, on occasion
- Other tests may be needed

Tell your healthcare providers if you have these symptoms:

- Family history of colon cancer
- Losing weight without meaning to
- Repeated or unexplained vomiting
- Stool that is black in colour or has blood in it

Talk to your healthcare providers if your symptoms don't improve, get worse, or keep interfering with your everyday activities.

Once you find something that works for you, stick with it.

You may need to keep trying other options to find what works best to manage your symptoms.



4. Medicine that may be tried

- Many options can be used to reduce chronic abdominal pain and improve your symptoms
- Talk with your healthcare providers about what medicines may be right for you



What do I need to know about my symptoms and chronic abdominal pain?

Working through the chronic abdominal pain patient pathway can take several months:

- Your healthcare providers will ask you questions about your health and do a physical exam. They will also review any medicines you are taking.
- They may suggest certain tests to learn more about possible causes of your symptoms.
- They will talk with you about possible lifestyle habits that may be causing your symptoms and how you can make changes that could help you feel better.
- You may find it helpful to write down your symptoms and what seems to cause them (e.g. certain foods or stress). You and your healthcare providers can make a plan to help manage your symptoms using this information.
- Together, you may decide to try certain dietary changes and/or medicines to help in treating your symptoms.
- You may use medicines for a short amount of time (or possibly longer) depending on whether your symptoms improve.

To manage your symptoms, try to:

- Identify what causes you stress and work on reducing it. You may want to try yoga, meditation, counselling, or a stress reduction program.
- Identify foods that may cause your symptoms. You may want to keep track of the foods you eat and how they affect your pain.
- Get at least 20 minutes of physical activity daily. Aim for 150 minutes each week (e.g. walking, biking, gardening, stairs, or your favourite sports).

Seeing a specialist is only recommended if:

- Your symptoms continue or get worse after following treatment and management options in the chronic abdominal pain pathway.
- You and your healthcare providers identify concerning symptoms or test results.

You can find more information in the great resources below:


- International Foundation for Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD) iffgd.org
 - GI Disorders → Functional Abdominal Pain Syndrome
- Alberta Healthy Living Program ahs.ca/info/page13984.aspx
 - Workshops on chronic pain and stress reduction
- Nutrition Education Materials ahs.ca/NutritionResources

Write any notes or questions you may have here:

Please provide feedback about this patient pathway by completing a short [survey](https://bit.ly/DHSCNSurvey) (bit.ly/DHSCNSurvey) or email us at Digestivehealth.SCN@ahs.ca



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