SYMPTOM

Point tenderness - abdomen

Abdominal point tenderness is pain in one small area when it is pressed.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
A small spot hurts when you press it

WHERE IT IS FELT
Belly, from below the ribs to the pelvis

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Muscle strain, constipation, trapped gas

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Worsening one-spot pain with fever or repeated vomiting

USUALLY LASTS
Hours to weeks, based on the underlying cause

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Persists beyond a few days, recurs, or limits activities

Overview

Point tenderness means that one small area of your abdomen hurts more than the surrounding area when pressed. The abdomen is the area between your ribs and pelvis.

The tenderness may come from the skin, abdominal muscles, or organs inside the abdomen. Its location can offer clues, but it cannot confirm a diagnosis by itself. Even conditions that usually affect one area can cause pain elsewhere.

Some causes, such as a strained muscle or constipation, often improve with simple care. Other causes need prompt assessment, especially when the pain is worsening or occurs with fever, vomiting, faintness, or a hard abdomen.

Avoid repeatedly pressing the spot to test it. Frequent checking can irritate the area and does not reliably show whether the problem is improving.

What it may feel or look like

You may notice pain only when you touch, press, cough, bend, or tighten your stomach muscles. In other cases, the area may ache even when you are resting.

The tender spot may feel sharp, sore, bruised, burning, or cramp-like. There may also be:

A clinician may check for guarding , which means your abdominal muscles tighten when the area is touched. A very firm abdomen or severe pain when pressure is released can suggest irritation inside the abdomen and needs urgent assessment.

- Bloating, gas, constipation, or diarrhoea
- Nausea, reduced appetite, or vomiting
- Pain with movement, coughing, or lifting
- A bruise, rash, swelling, or small lump
- Urinary symptoms or pain during a menstrual period

Common causes

Many different problems can cause one tender area. The likely causes depend on the exact location, how the pain began, and any other symptoms.

Common or usually less serious causes include:

Less common causes include a hernia, urinary infection, kidney stone, stomach ulcer, ovarian cyst, endometriosis, or inflammation of the bowel. A hernia may cause a lump that becomes more noticeable when you cough or stand.

Some urgent conditions can also begin as localized tenderness. These include appendicitis, gallbladder inflammation, diverticulitis, pancreatitis, bowel blockage, and pregnancy outside the uterus, called an ectopic pregnancy. These conditions usually cause other changes, such as worsening pain, fever, persistent vomiting, abdominal swelling, bleeding, or feeling very unwell.

- Muscle strain: Often follows exercise, lifting, coughing, or an awkward movement. It may hurt more when you sit up or tighten your abdomen.
- Constipation or trapped gas: May cause bloating, cramps, and tenderness that changes after passing stool or gas.
- Stomach or bowel infection: Often causes cramps, diarrhoea, nausea, or vomiting.
- Minor injury: A bump or pressure from clothing can leave a small bruised area.
- Abdominal wall pain: A muscle, small nerve, or area of tissue in the abdominal wall may become irritated.

When to seek medical care

Arrange a same-day medical assessment if the tenderness is new and worsening, especially if you also have:

Seek emergency help for sudden or severe abdominal pain, a hard or markedly swollen abdomen, fainting, confusion, trouble breathing, chest pain, vomiting blood, or black or bloody stool.

Possible pregnancy with abdominal pain plus vaginal bleeding, shoulder-tip pain, marked dizziness, or fainting also needs emergency care.

Book a routine appointment if a tender spot lasts more than a few days, keeps returning, or affects eating, sleep, work, or usual activities. A persistent or growing lump, unexplained weight loss, ongoing bowel changes, or tenderness after a recent injury should also be checked.

- Fever, repeated vomiting, or difficulty keeping fluids down
- Pain that moves to or settles in the lower right abdomen
- Increasing pain under the right ribs
- A painful lump that does not flatten when you lie down
- Pain when urinating, blood in the urine, or severe back or side pain
- Possible pregnancy with one-sided lower abdominal pain

How the cause is found

A clinician will ask when the tenderness started, whether it is changing, and what makes it better or worse. They may ask about meals, bowel movements, urination, menstrual periods, pregnancy possibility, injuries, recent illness, medicines, and previous surgery.

During an examination, they may gently feel different parts of your abdomen. They may check whether the pain changes when you tighten your abdominal muscles. Pain that stays the same or becomes stronger can point toward the abdominal wall, although this finding is not conclusive.

Tests are not always needed. Depending on your symptoms, testing may include urine or blood tests, a pregnancy test, ultrasound, or a CT scan. Imaging is chosen based on the suspected cause rather than tenderness alone.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on what is causing the tenderness. Muscle pain may improve with rest from aggravating activity, while constipation may improve with fluids, movement, and appropriate dietary changes. Infections, inflammation, hernias, or problems involving an internal organ may need specific treatment.

If the pain is mild and you have no warning signs, you can:

Do not press deeply on the area, attempt to push back a painful lump, or take laxatives for severe unexplained abdominal pain. If symptoms are getting worse, do not delay assessment while trying home treatments.

- Avoid heavy lifting and movements that clearly worsen the pain
- Drink enough fluid and eat light, familiar foods as tolerated
- Use gentle warmth for a likely muscle strain
- Ask a pharmacist which pain medicine is suitable for you

What to expect

Tenderness from gas, constipation, a minor injury, or muscle strain may improve over several hours to days. A strained abdominal muscle can remain sore for longer, especially if coughing or activity continues to irritate it.

Tenderness caused by inflammation or an internal organ problem may worsen or become more constant. New symptoms can also develop. Pay attention to the overall pattern rather than repeatedly pressing the spot.

If you have been assessed but the pain changes, becomes stronger, or is joined by fever, vomiting, faintness, bleeding, or abdominal swelling, seek medical care again. An earlier examination may not always reveal a condition that is still developing.

Common questions

Does one tender spot mean appendicitis?

No. Appendicitis is one possible cause, but muscle strain, bowel symptoms, and other conditions can also cause localized tenderness. Appendicitis often becomes more painful over time and may cause nausea, reduced appetite, fever, or pain in the lower right abdomen.

Can trapped gas cause point tenderness?

Yes. Gas can stretch part of the bowel and cause a localized tender area. The location may

shift, and discomfort may improve after passing gas or stool. Persistent or worsening one-spot pain should not automatically be blamed on gas.

What if it only hurts when I press it?

Mild tenderness only with pressure may come from the abdominal wall or a minor injury. Stop checking it repeatedly. Arrange an appointment if it persists, recurs, or is associated with a lump or other symptoms.

Can the location identify the cause?

Location helps narrow the possibilities, but it is not enough to identify the cause. Organs overlap, and pain can be felt away from its source.

Sources

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