

15 Abdominal Pain

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Correctly diagnosing acute abdominal pain can be quite challenging. Few clinical situations require greater judgment, because the most catastrophic of events may be forecast by the subtlest of symptoms and signs. In every instance, the clinician must distinguish those conditions that require urgent intervention from those that do not and can best be managed nonoperatively. A meticulously executed, detailed history and physical examination are critically important for focusing the differential diagnosis and allowing the diagnostic evaluation to proceed expeditiously ([Table 15-1](#)).

TABLE 15-1 Some Key Components of the Patient's History

Age
Time and mode of onset of the pain
Pain characteristics
Duration of symptoms
Location of pain and sites of radiation
Associated symptoms and their relationship to the pain
Nausea, emesis, and anorexia
Diarrhea, constipation, or other changes in bowel habits
Menstrual history

The etiologic classification in [Table 15-2](#), although not complete, provides a useful framework for evaluating patients with abdominal pain.

TABLE 15-2 Some Important Causes of Abdominal Pain