

#6 Abdominal pain accompanied by vomiting

Sure, tummy aches can be harmless, but prolonged or severe pain can signal a number of serious gastrointestinal problems. And, when it's coupled with nausea and vomiting, it may not be a stomach bug or food poisoning like you might think. Rather, the uncomfortable combination could indicate one of the following health problems.

Gallstones

Gallstones are small, pebble-like substances that can develop in the gallbladder, which is where bile is stored after it's produced in the liver. "During digestion, the gallbladder contracts and empties the bile into the intestine. If there are stones, they may move during this process, leading the patient to experience 'colicky pain' that can last several hours, and include nausea and vomiting," says gastroenterologist DR ANDREA RAJNAKOVA. "If gallstones move from the gallbladder into the bile ducts and create blockage, the patient can experience severe pain and jaundice and develop a fever."

Gallstones can be detected via ultrasound. If they don't cause any symptoms or problems, they don't require any treatment, she says. "However, if they are the cause of frequent attacks of pain and indigestion, removal of the gallbladder will be recommended."

Helicobacter pylori infection

"*Helicobacter pylori* is a spiral-shaped bacterium that lives in the stomach. It's now known to be associated with gastritis, gastric ulcers and stomach cancers," says Dr Rajnakova. "Common complaints include pain or discomfort, usually in the upper abdomen, bloating, feeling full after meals, lack of appetite, nausea and vomiting. It can be detected with gastroscopy, and treatment normally involves taking medication to reduce acid and antibiotics."



Stomach cancer

In the early stages, stomach cancer may cause indigestion, bloating after a meal, heartburn, slight nausea and loss of appetite. As stomach tumours grow, the symptoms worsen to include stomach pain, indigestion, loss of appetite, vomiting, weight loss, fatigue, anaemia, blood in the stool and more.

Of course, even if you're not vomiting but you are experiencing severe stomach pain, it's still crucial to get checked by a doctor. Prolonged abdominal pain alone could be a sign of gastritis (inflammation of the stomach lining), peptic ulcer (a break in the lining of the stomach or the first part of the small intestine), reflux or other conditions. According to Dr Rajnakova, a doctor should always be consulted if:

- your indigestion symptoms persist for more than two weeks, especially if it's a new symptom that doesn't respond to over-the-counter medication, and interferes with work, leisure or sleep;
- you're over 40 years old;
- you have a family history of digestive or colon problems or cancer;
- you drink or smoke heavily; or
- you take aspirin or painkillers regularly.

Additionally, she says you should also consult your doctor urgently if you experience blood in your vomit, black "tarry" stools, loss of appetite or weight loss, difficulty swallowing, anaemia or jaundice. Tests such as gastroscopy, colonoscopy or ultrasound scans may be arranged for investigation.

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