

# Introduction

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Abdominal symptoms are a frequent cause for surgical consultation. The underlying cause may be acute, presenting with the euphemistically termed 'acute abdomen'; subacute, indicating an evolving disorder; or longstanding, suggesting a functional or degenerative condition. Occasionally symptoms are due to disorders outside the abdomen, in which case the term 'referred' is used; for example, epigastric pain experienced as a result of a myocardial infarction. At first presentation, a detailed clinical history and careful clinical examination are essential to establish a differential diagnosis, which, in turn, leads to appropriate triage into urgent and non-urgent investigation and subsequent treatment. The advent of telemedicine and online remote consultation does not alter the basic art and science of consultation; however, the inability to perform a 'physical' examination may hamper arrival at a proper diagnosis. In such a scenario, a patient should be asked to come for a face-to-face consultation, physical examination and necessary investigations. It is vital to not miss a potentially seriously illness that needs urgent attention.

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