

Summary

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Abdominal distension may result from causes in the anterior abdominal wall or intra-abdominal causes. Causes in the anterior abdominal wall include hypotonia of muscles , congenitally absent muscles , obesity , subcutaneous emphysema and defect in the abdominal wall . Intra-abdominal causes are mainly due to accumulation of gas or fluid or solid abdominal mass .

Accumulation of free fluid in the peritoneal cavity occurs in cases of ascites . Ascites may be the only clinical feature in cases of tuberculous peritonitis , and malignant deposition in the peritoneal cavity . In other cases , ascites may be only a part of generalized oedema as in cases of nephrotic syndrome and congestive heart failure .

Cystic collection of fluid may occur in cases of ovarian cyst , mesenteric or omental cyst . In these cases , in contrast to cases of ascites , fluid does not change in position on changing the position of the patient .

Abdominal distension due to excessive amounts of gas occurs either in cases of intestinal obstruction or cases of malabsorption with bacterial form-

ation of intestinal contents . Cases of intestinal obstruction are usually acute urgent cases with abdominal pain and vomiting . Causes of intestinal obstruction differs in the neonatal period from in older children . In the neonatal period , intestinal obstruction may result from meconium obstruction , congenital atresias , malrotations . In the later age group intussusception and Hirschsprung's disease are more common . Cases of malabsorption usually present with gastrointestinal troubles and failure to thrive in addition to abdominal distension . Most important forms of this form of distension are cystic fibrosis.

Solid masses causing abdominal distension are variable . The most important masses are Wilm's tumour , neuroblastoma , retroperitoneal masses in addition to causes of diffuse organomegally .

Diagnosis of these variable causes of abdominal distension depends mainly on careful history taking, complete physical examination and diagnostic investigations . Investigations must be chosen according to the possible clinical diagnosis .

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