



a-z

Common Symptom Answer Guide

A Family Medical Reference

- ▷ Common symptoms organized alphabetically
- ▷ Easy-to-read language
- ▷ A glossary of common medical terms

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Contents

| | |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| <i>Preface</i> | <i>ix</i> |
| <i>How to Use This Book</i> | <i>xiii</i> |
| <i>Acknowledgments</i> | <i>xvii</i> |
| | |
| Abdominal Pain (Adult) | 1 |
| Abdominal Pain (Child) | 5 |
| Allergic Symptoms | 9 |
| Anus Problems | 11 |
| Back Pain | 13 |
| Bed Wetting (Child) | 17 |
| Blackouts | 19 |
| Bloating | 21 |
| Blood in Stool | 23 |
| Breast Problems | 26 |
| Breathing Problems (Adult) | 29 |
| Breathing Problems (Child) | 33 |
| Bruising and Bleeding Tendencies | 36 |
| Burns | 38 |
| Chest Pain | 40 |
| Confusion | 45 |
| Constipation (Adult) | 47 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Constipation (Child) | 49 |
| Convulsions (Seizures) | 51 |
| Cough | 54 |
| Cuts and Scrapes | 58 |
| Depression, Suicidal Thoughts, or Anxiety | 59 |
| Diaper Problems | 61 |
| Diarrhea | 63 |
| Difficulty Swallowing | 68 |
| Dizziness | 71 |
| Ear Problems | 74 |
| Excessive Drinking (Water) | 77 |
| Eye Problems | 80 |
| Facial Pain | 86 |
| Fever | 88 |
| Foot or Ankle Pain | 92 |
| Frostbite | 95 |
| Gait-Coordination Problems | 96 |
| Groin Pain | 99 |
| Hair Problems | 101 |
| Hand, Wrist, or Arm Problems | 103 |
| Head Injury | 107 |
| Headache | 109 |
| Heart Pounding | 113 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Heartburn | 115 |
| Heat Stroke | 117 |
| Heavy Drinking (Alcohol) | 119 |
| Hiccough | 121 |
| Hoarseness | 123 |
| Injury (including Back Injury/Pain) | 125 |
| Irritability (Child) | 131 |
| Joint Pain | 133 |
| Loss of Consciousness | 139 |
| Menstrual Cramps | 143 |
| Mental Delays (Child) | 145 |
| Mouth Trouble | 147 |
| Muscle Weakness | 151 |
| Nail Problems | 154 |
| Nausea and Vomiting (Adult) | 157 |
| Nausea and Vomiting (Child) | 161 |
| Neck Problems | 164 |
| Numbness, Loss of Movement, or Trouble Talking | 166 |
| Overdose or Poisoning | 169 |
| Overeating | 171 |
| Poor Appetite | 173 |
| Pregnancy | 175 |
| Sexual Problems and Inability to Conceive | 177 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|
| Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) | 180 |
| Shakiness | 182 |
| Skin Problems | 185 |
| Sleep Problems | 189 |
| Small Baby | 191 |
| Swelling | 193 |
| Testicle Problems | 196 |
| Urine Problems | 199 |
| Vaginal Bleeding Problems | 202 |
| Vaginal Discharge | 204 |
| Weakness | 206 |
| Yellow Skin | 208 |
| <i>Glossary</i> | 211 |

When Something Feels Wrong

Symptoms are what you feel when your body's machinery isn't working perfectly. About twenty symptoms account for most of the reasons people go to health professionals. People visit a health professional when the symptoms limit daily activities. They also visit health professionals to learn whether their symptoms indicate an increased risk for serious problems.

The most common group of symptoms is caused when a "bug" (bacteria or virus) has invaded the body. The typical symptoms of a "bug" are cough, fever, chills, runny nose, sneezing, sore throat, earache, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. When caused by a "bug," these symptoms usually resolve within three weeks.

Symptoms caused by bacteria or viruses are particularly common in young children because the child's body is just learning how to fight the most common "bugs." We call this building up immunity. Immunizations are given to young children to help speed up this process and eliminate the problems caused when these bugs are able to invade the body. It's important to note that in children and adults, symptoms caused by viruses will not be helped by antibiotics.

The next most common symptoms are those related to "wear and tear" on the body. Low back, knee, leg, foot, hand, neck, and shoulder pains are most often caused by "wear and tear." These symptoms persist for weeks, months, or a lifetime.

After these two groupings, there a number of common symptoms with several or less obvious causes: headaches, abdominal (belly) pains, shortness of breath (difficulty breathing), chest pains, red or itching skin, emotional problems, dizziness, tiredness, and fatigue. These symptoms tend to occur again and again.

When Symptoms Limit Daily Activities

The more numerous, severe, and persistent our symptoms, the more they limit our ability to perform daily activities. Among adults,