

# The Vomiting Patient

## Small Bowel Obstruction, Cyclic Vomiting, and Gastroparesis



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### KEYWORDS

- Small bowel obstruction • Cyclic vomiting • Cannabinoid hyperemesis
- Gastroparesis • Prokinetic agents

### KEY POINTS

- Small bowel obstructions represent 15% of emergency department visits for acute abdominal pain and can be associated with significant morbidity and mortality if unrecognized and untreated.
- Computed tomography scans have become the mainstay of diagnosis, and management should be designed to correct physiologic and electrolyte disturbances, allow bowel rest, and remove the source of the obstruction.
- Cyclic vomiting syndrome is a poorly understood condition characterized by recurrent episodes of intense vomiting, which is treated acutely with antiemetics, fluids, and electrolyte replacement, although, among adults, cannabinoid may represent a previously under-recognized cause.
- Gastroparesis is a chronic motility disorder of the stomach that involves delayed gastric emptying without evidence of mechanical obstruction.
- First-line therapy in the emergency department is the use of metoclopramide, but domperidone, erythromycin, and antiemetics are also often used, and interventional therapy should be reserved for refractory cases.

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## APPROACH TO VOMITING PATIENTS

Vomiting and abdominal pain are among the most common complaints for which patients present to the emergency department. **Box 1** lists the differential diagnoses for vomiting. A thorough history, physical examination, and evaluation in the emergency department can help narrow the differential diagnosis for a more certain diagnosis.

### Box 1

#### Differential diagnosis for vomiting

##### Abdominal causes

- Mechanical obstruction
- Motility disorders
- Acute appendicitis
- Acute cholecystitis
- Acute hepatitis
- Acute mesenteric ischemia
- Crohn disease
- Gastric and duodenal ulcer disease
- Pancreatitis and pancreatic neoplasms
- Peritonitis and peritoneal carcinomatosis
- Retroperitoneal and mesenteric disorders
- Acute cholecystitis
- Acute hepatitis
- Acute mesenteric ischemia
- Crohn disease
- Gastric and duodenal ulcer disease
- Pancreatitis and pancreatic neoplasms
- Peritonitis and peritoneal carcinomatosis
- Retroperitoneal and mesenteric disorders

##### Drugs

##### Infectious causes

- Acute gastroenteritis
- Systemic infections

##### Metabolic and endocrine causes

- Acute intermittent porphyria
- Addison disease
- Diabetic ketoacidosis
- Hypoparathyroidism/hyperparathyroidism
- Hyperthyroidism
- Pregnancy

##### Nervous system causes

- Demyelinating disorders
- Hydrocephalus
- Intracerebral lesions
- Labyrinthine disorders
- Meningitis
- Migraine headaches
- Seizure disorders

##### Other causes

- Anxiety and depression
- Cardiac disorders
- Collagen vascular diseases
- Paraneoplastic syndromes
- Postoperative states
- Eating disorders

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