

Hello, my name is [NAME], I'm a medical student at [UNIVERSITY]. I've been asked to examine your abdomen. This will involve looking, feeling, listening and gently pressing on your tummy. It shouldn't be uncomfortable, but if anything hurts, please let me know. Is that alright?"

Wash hands.

Check identity.

Ensure privacy.

Expose from the sternum to the pubic symphysis.

Position the patient at 45 degrees. Ask about pain.

### **General Inspection**

"I'm first looking at the patient from the end of the bed."

I observe their comfort, colour, and whether they look unwell. I look around the bed for oxygen, drips, NG tubes, vomit bowls, stoma equipment, or any fluid balance charts.

### **Hands and Arms**

"I'm checking the hands."

I look for clubbing, koilonychia, leukonychia and palmar erythema. I check for Dupuytren's contracture.

I take the radial pulse for 30 seconds.

I assess for asterixis by asking the patient to stretch their arms out with wrists extended.

I also look for track marks, scratch marks and bruising.

### **Face**

"I'm examining the face."

I look at the eyes for conjunctival pallor and scleral icterus.

I inspect the mouth, looking at hydration, breath smell, any oral candidiasis or ulcers, and the tongue for glossitis or pallor.

### **Neck**

"I'm feeling the cervical lymph nodes."

I examine systematically from submental to supraclavicular nodes, assessing size, tenderness and mobility.

### **Abdominal Inspection**

"Now I'm inspecting the abdomen."

I look for distension, scars, striae, caput medusae, bruising, stomas, drains or tubes. I also check the chest for spider naevi or gynaecomastia.

## Palpation

"I will start by gently feeling your abdomen. Please tell me if you feel any pain."

- Light palpation in all nine regions
- Deep palpation in all nine regions
- Rovsing's sign: palpate LIF and ask if pain appears in RIF
- Liver edge: palpate from RIF upwards during breathing
- Murphy's sign in the RUQ
- Spleen: palpate from RIF towards left costal margin
- Kidneys: ballot both kidneys
- Abdominal aorta: feel for expansile pulsation

## Percussion

I percuss the liver and spleen borders.

I percuss the bladder from above.

I check for shifting dullness if ascites is suspected.

## Auscultation

I listen for bowel sounds in all quadrants, assessing for normal, tinkling or absent sounds.

## Special Examinations (with chaperone)

"At this stage, some further examinations may be required such as checking the inguinal nodes, hernial orifices, external genitalia or performing a digital rectal exam, but I would only do these with a chaperone and with your consent."

## Lower Limbs

I check for pitting oedema and look for bruising or erythema nodosum.

## To Finish

"That's the end of the examination. I'll make sure you're comfortable and covered again. Thank you."

## Wash hands.

## Hand Signs Explained Simply

### Clubbing

**What to see:** The nails curve over the fingertips, and when you put two fingers back-to-back, the small diamond-shaped gap is missing.

**What it means:** Seen in several chronic conditions, including liver disease, inflammatory bowel disease and coeliac disease.

### Koilonychia

**What to see:** Spoon-shaped nails that dip inwards like a small bowl.

**What it means:** Often linked to iron deficiency anaemia.

### Leukonychia

**What to see:** Pale or completely white nails.

**What it means:** Can occur if albumin levels are low, such as in cirrhosis or nephrotic syndrome.

### Tar stains

**What to see:** Yellow-brown staining on fingertips from tobacco.

**What it means:** Suggests smoking, which increases risks of malignancy and worsens Crohn's disease.

### Palmar erythema

**What to see:** Redness in the centre of the palms, especially at the thenar and hypothenar areas.

**What it means:** Commonly associated with chronic liver disease.

### Dupuytren's contracture

**What to see:** Thickening or small nodules in the palm, often causing the ring or little finger to bend in.

**What it means:** Can be seen in alcoholic liver disease, though it may also be genetic.

## Other Signs on the Arms

### Asterixis

**What to see:** When the patient stretches their hands forward with wrists cocked back, the hands flap uncontrollably.

**What it means:** Suggests liver failure causing a buildup of toxins.

### Scratch marks

**What to see:** Linear marks on the skin where the patient has been itching a lot.

**What it means:** Seen in hyperbilirubinaemia, because bilirubin buildup causes itchiness.

### Track marks

**What to see:** Small puncture marks along veins, usually in the forearms.

**What it means:** Suggests intravenous drug use, which increases the risk of hepatitis.

### Armpit hair loss

**What to see:** Reduced or absent underarm hair.

**What it means:** Can occur due to increased oestrogen in liver failure.

## Face Signs Explained Simply

### Conjunctival pallor

**What to see:** Inner eyelids look pale instead of pink.

**What it means:** Indicates severe anaemia.

### Scleral icterus

**What to see:** Yellowing of the whites of the eyes.

**What it means:** Early sign of jaundice, helpful especially in darker skin tones.

### Oral candidiasis

**What to see:** White patches in the mouth that scrape off easily.

**What it means:** Can happen with chronic steroid use or immunosuppression.

## Aphthous ulcers

**What to see:** Small round painful ulcers in the mouth.

**What it means:** Seen in Crohn's disease and several micronutrient deficiencies. Can be normal too.

## Angular stomatitis

**What to see:** Cracking or inflammation at the corners of the mouth.

**What it means:** Usually due to protein or micronutrient deficiency.

## Glossitis

**What to see:** Smooth, swollen, often shiny tongue.

**What it means:** Suggests low B12 or folate.

## Pale tongue

**What to see:** Tongue looks washed out or much paler than normal.

**What it means:** Indicates iron deficiency.

## Other Terminology

### Rovsing's sign

**What to look for:** Press gently in the **left iliac fossa**.

**Positive if:** The patient feels **pain in the right iliac fossa** instead.

**Meaning:** Suggests **appendicitis** because pushing on the left shifts gas/stool and stretches the inflamed appendix on the right.

### Murphy's sign

**What to look for:** Place your hand in the **right upper quadrant** under the costal margin and ask the patient to **take a deep breath**.

**Positive if:** The patient suddenly **stops breathing due to pain**.

**Meaning:** Indicates **acute cholecystitis** (inflamed gallbladder).

### Hepatomegaly (feeling the liver edge)

**What to look for:** Start in the **right iliac fossa** and move upwards during inspiration.

**Positive if:** You feel a **firm edge** tapping your fingertips on inspiration.

**Meaning:** Suggests liver enlargement due to cirrhosis, cancer, lymphoma or congestion.

## Splenomegaly

**What to look for:** Start in the **right iliac fossa** and palpate diagonally towards the left costal margin.

**Positive if:** You feel the spleen move on inspiration (spleen enlarges towards the right).

**Meaning:** Seen in leukaemia, lymphoma, infections and portal hypertension.

## Balloting the kidneys

**What to look for:** Place one hand behind the flank and one on the front, and “bounce” the kidney between your hands.

**Positive if:** The kidney is **enlarged** and easily felt.

**Meaning:** Suggests **polycystic kidney disease** or hydronephrosis.

## Palpable abdominal aorta

**What to look for:** Feel with both hands above the umbilicus.

**Positive if:** It feels **expansile** (pushes your fingers apart).

**Meaning:** Suggests an **abdominal aortic aneurysm**.

## Shifting dullness

**What to look for:** Percuss from centre to flank listening for dullness. Ask patient to roll on their side and percuss again.

**Positive if:** Area that was dull becomes **resonant** after turning.

**Meaning:** Indicates **ascites** (free fluid).

## Distension — the “6 F’s”

**What to look for:** General abdominal swelling.

**Meaning:**

Fat

Fluid (ascites)

Flatus (gas)

Faeces (constipation)

Foetus (pregnancy)

“Flump” (mass)

## Spider naevi

**What to look for:** Small red spots with radiating vessels on the chest.

**Meaning:** Linked to **high oestrogen** in chronic liver disease.

### Caput medusae

**What to look for:** Veins radiating from the umbilicus.

**Meaning:** Portal hypertension.

### Grey-Turner's sign

**What to look for:** Bruising over the flanks.

**Meaning:** Retroperitoneal bleeding, often from pancreatitis.

### Cullen's sign

**What to look for:** Bruising around the umbilicus.

**Meaning:** Internal bleeding, also linked to pancreatitis.

### Tinkling bowel sounds

**What to listen for:** High-pitched "tinkling".

**Meaning:** Bowel obstruction.

### Absent bowel sounds

**What to listen for:** No sounds after listening for at least 30 seconds.

**Meaning:** Ileus or obstruction.