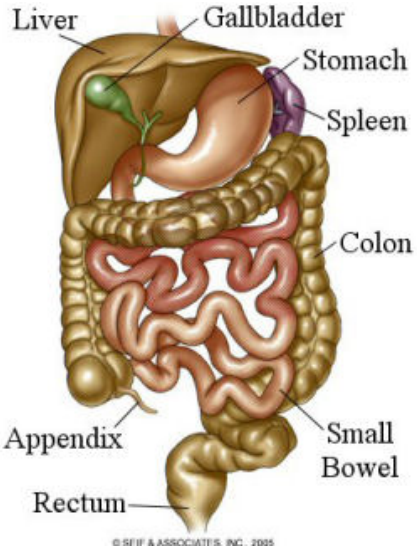
Small Bowel Obstruction

Your exam shows you have a blockage or obstruction of your *small intestine* (small bowel). The small bowel is a long, slender tube that connects the stomach to the colon. Its job is to *absorb* (take in) fluids and foods you eat and drink into the blood stream.



SYMPTOMS

Symptoms of small bowel obstruction include:

- Cramping abdominal pain
- Nausea & vomiting
- Distended or swollen stomach
- Diarrhea

CAUSES

There are many causes of intestinal blockage. The most common ones include:

- Hernias
- Inflammatory bowel disease (enteritis and colitis)
- Twisting of the bowel (*volvulus*)
- Tumors
- Adhesions (from previous surgery or radiation treatments)

DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver can usually diagnose small bowel obstruction by taking a history, doing a physical exam, and taking x-rays.

TREATMENT

- The treatment of the blockage depends on the cause and how bad the problem is. Sometimes the obstruction improves with bed rest and IV fluids. Usually a small tube (nasogastric tube) is placed into the stomach to decompress the bowel.
- When the bowel is blocked it usually swells up like a balloon filled with air and fluids. Decompression means that the air and fluids are removed by suction on that tube. These measures to improve the problem are called conservative measures.
- **Surgery may be required if conservative measures do not work.** Bowel obstruction from a hernia may require early surgery and can be an emergency procedure.
- If your bowel obstruction is only partial or incomplete and you are allowed to go home, you should get plenty of rest and stick to clear liquids until your condition improves. Follow your diet as directed. Avoid solid foods as instructed.

SEEK MEDICAL CARE IMMEDIATELY IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Increased pain or cramping
- Vomiting of blood
- Confusion
- *Dehydration* (feeling very dry or thirsty)
- Severe bloating
- Chills or fever
- Extreme weakness or fainting
- Continued or repeated vomiting

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