

Evaluation of Non-specific Presenting Symptoms

Presenting Symptom	Possible Causes	Information Needed
Fever	Infection, hot environment, dehydration, thyroid storm, breakdown of necrotic tissue (such as postop or after an MI). Injury to the hypothalamus. Many meds have the ability to cause fever.	<p>Ask: Pain? How long febrile? Anyone in family sick? Recent surgery or injury? Recent chest pain? Meds taken in last several days?</p> <p>Observe for: Guarding of any body area, dehydration, redness, lesions, or injury</p>
Wheezing or SOB	Asthma, CHF, tumor, aspiration of foreign body, TB, COPD, acute allergic reaction. In infant, bronchiolitis. In child, crou	<p>Ask: History or family history of breathing problems? Allergies? How long wheezing? Meds taken in past few days? Exposure to harsh chemicals? Any episode of coughing in past few days (which may indicate aspiration especially in young child)? Worried?</p> <p>Observe: All VS, color of lips and nail beds, O₂ saturation, preferred position, chest shape and movement with respirations, lung sounds during auscultation, facial expression.</p>
Chest pain	Acute MI, angina, pericarditis, costochondritis, pulmonary embolism, pneumothorax, pleurisy, indigestion.	<p>Ask: Describe pain. Point to location of pain. Are there other symptoms? Does the pain radiate? If so, where? Rate pain 1–10. Any previous trauma? Anything make pain better or worse? Worried?</p> <p>Observe: All VS, color of lips and nail beds, O₂ sat, facial expression.</p>
Abdominal pain	Indigestion, ulcer, gastroenteritis, cholecystitis, UTI, PID, ectopic pregnancy, cyst or tumor. With children, also suspect volvulus, intussusception, strep throat, or pneumonia.	<p>Ask: Describe pain. Point to pain. Rate pain 1–10. Other symptoms? Last BM? Appearance of stool? Previous abdominal surgery or trauma? Worried? Anything make pain better or worse? Last menstrual period?</p> <p>Observe: All VS, guarding, bowel sounds, appearance of abdomen, palpable masses, facial expression.</p>

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