

Peritonitis

Definition

An inflammation of the peritoneum, the membrane that lines the wall of the abdomen and covers the organs.

Causes, Incidence, and Risk Factors

Types of peritonitis include:

- Spontaneous
- Secondary
- Dialysis Associated
- Intraabdominal abscess

Spontaneous Peritonitis

- The cause of spontaneous peritonitis is infection in the blood. Fluid accumulates in the peritoneal cavity when it is not reabsorbed in the normal way.
- Risk factors include
 - alcoholic cirrhosis
 - nephrotic syndrome
 - peptic ulcer disease
 - appendicitis
 - diverticulitis
- The incidence of this disease is approximately 2 out of 1 million people per year.
- It is rare in children.

Secondary Peritonitis

The causes of secondary peritonitis include:

- Entry of bacteria into the peritoneum from a perforation in the gastrointestinal tract, as from a ruptured appendix
- Severe chemical reactions from pancreatic enzymes or bile as a result of injury or perforation of the intestine or biliary tract.

Dialysis Associated Peritonitis

- The cause of dialysis-associated peritonitis may be the introduction of bacteria into the peritoneum by the dialysis procedure.
- Risk factors include renal failure requiring peritoneal dialysis.
- Pneumococci and staphylococci are the most common organisms.

Intraabdominal abscess

- A collection of pus in the abdomen, may cause peritonitis.
- Before peritonitis develops it can still cause symptoms that are similar or identical to peritonitis.

Prevention

Prevention depends on the cause.

Spontaneous and Secondary:

Early diagnosis of conditions which cause perforation and treat as appropriate.

Dialysis Associated:

Observation of strict procedures of hygiene when performing dialysis so as no to introduce bacteria into the peritoneal space.

Symptoms

- fluid in the abdomen
- inability to pass feces or gas
- abdominal distention
- abdominal pain
- abdominal tenderness
- distended abdomen
- fever
- low urine output
- nausea and vomiting
- point tenderness
- thirst

Signs and Tests

- Examination of the abdomen typically shows tenderness.
- The abdomen may feel firm and "board-like" and there may be extensive "guarding"

Treatment

The cause must be identified and treated promptly.

Prognosis

- Peritonitis is a life threatening condition which must be treated appropriately. The outcome is poor without treatment.
- Sometimes the outcome is poor even with prompt and adequate treatment.

