

Example 1: Abdominal Pain

The location of the pain is a critical pivotal point for framing the differential diagnosis:

Pain Location	Possible Diagnoses
Right Upper Quadrant (RUQ)	Biliary disease (colic, cholecystitis), hepatitis, pancreatitis.
Epigastrium	Peptic ulcer disease, pancreatitis, biliary disease.
Diffuse/Perumbilical	Appendicitis (early), bowel obstruction, irritable bowel syndrome, mesenteric ischemia.
Right Lower Quadrant (RLQ)	Appendicitis, Crohn's disease, ovarian pathology (in women).
Left Lower Quadrant (LLQ)	Diverticulitis, ovarian pathology (in women).

Example 2: Headache

The pattern and quality of the headache help distinguish between primary headache disorders and more serious secondary causes.

Headache Type	Possible Diagnoses
Primary Headaches	Migraine, tension-type headache, cluster headache.
Secondary Headaches	Meningitis, subarachnoid hemorrhage, brain tumor, giant cell arteritis.

Example 3: Shortness of Breath (Dyspnea)

This symptom can arise from problems in the cardiac, pulmonary, or other systems.

System Involved	Possible Diagnoses
Pulmonary	Asthma, COPD, pneumonia, pulmonary embolism, pleural effusion.
Cardiac	Heart failure, coronary artery disease, arrhythmias.
Other	Anemia, anxiety, deconditioning.

Example 4: Cough

The duration and character of the cough (e.g., productive vs. dry) are key pivotal points.

Context	Possible Diagnoses
Acute Cough	Common cold, acute bronchitis, pneumonia, COVID-19, heart failure.
Chronic Cough	COPD, asthma, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), postnasal drip, certain medications (e.g., ACE inhibitors).