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ABDOMINAL EXAMINATION

Conducting an abdominal examination before a vaginal examination is important, as it enables the patient to get used to being examined prior to the more intimate part of the examination. It also gives information to aid a clinical diagnosis and to inform further examinations, for example, a palpable mass.

1. Wash your hands.
2. Expose the lower abdomen and inspect.
3. Ask the patient if they have any areas of tenderness.
4. Palpate in the four quadrants like in any standard abdominal examination, identifying masses and areas of tenderness. Take particular notice of tenderness or masses palpated over the 'triangle' area (Fig. 1.1) between the anterior superior iliac crests and symphysis pubis, as this is where the ovaries, uterus and bladder will be palpated.
5. Assess other aspects of the standard abdominal examination as dictated by the history and examination findings, such as balloning the kidneys, palpating the liver and spleen, testing for pain on a straight-leg raise and listening for bowel sounds.