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All the conditions listed may produce a localized peritonitis in the right lower quadrant of the abdomen, but if these symptoms occur suddenly in a woman of childbearing age who has had a normal temperature and who also exhibits signs of hypovolemia, the diagnosis most strongly suggested would be ruptured ectopic pregnancy (C).

Acute appendicitis is usually more insidious in onset and is often associated with a slightly elevated temperature. Acute pyelonephritis and acute salpingitis are febrile illnesses and are not usually associated with hypovolemia. A perforated ulcer ordinarily produces signs of a more generalized peritonitis.

Reference:

Cope Z: The Early Diagnosis of the Acute Abdomen, ed 13. London, Oxford University Press, 1968, pp 142-150

NOTICE: this is one of 750 items that comprise SESAP II, the College's second Surgical Education and Self-Assessment Program. To learn more about the program, write: SESAP II; c/o American College of Surgeons; 55 East Erie Street; Chicago, Ill. 60611.

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