OSCE checklist for abdominal examination

An OSCE checklist for abdominal examination runs from introduction and positioning through inspection, palpation, percussion and auscultation to a tidy finish. This one is our own practice list.

The checklist, step by step

1. Wash your hands, introduce yourself, confirm the patient's name and date of birth, and explain what you will do.
2. Gain consent, offer a chaperone, and ask about pain and where it is.
3. Lay the patient flat with one pillow. Expose from the chest to the groin, keeping the rest covered.
4. Look from the end of the bed: distension, scars, stoma, masses, jaundice, and how the patient looks and breathes.
5. Check the hands, eyes, mouth and neck for signs of anaemia, jaundice and liver disease, and feel the neck for nodes.
6. Inspect the abdomen. Ask the patient to cough and watch for a hernia or pain.
7. Palpate lightly, starting away from any pain and watching the face, then more deeply in each region. Note tenderness, guarding and masses.
8. Feel for the liver, spleen and kidneys, and for an aortic pulsation.
9. Percuss the liver and spleen edges, and test for fluid if the abdomen is swollen.
10. Listen for bowel sounds.
11. Say that you would also examine the hernial orifices and genitalia, and consider a rectal examination.
12. Cover the patient, thank them, wash your hands, and give a summary and next tests.

What candidates commonly forget

- Looking at the patient's face during palpation, not only the abdomen.
- Starting away from the painful area.

- Checking the hands, eyes and neck before the abdomen.
- Offering the hernial orifices, genitalia and rectal examination out loud.
- Asking for tests and a differential at the end.

How to use this list

This is our own practice checklist. Exam bodies mark in their own way. Use it to build a routine, then say each step aloud as you do it. You can also practise with an AI patient on this site, and try one station free with no sign-up. For original examination stations, see the PLAB 2 stations list.

Common questions

What is the order of an abdominal examination?

Most courses teach look, feel, percuss and listen, after a general check and the hands, eyes and neck. Some teach listening before palpation. Follow what your course teaches and stay consistent.

Do I need a chaperone for an abdominal examination?

Offer one, and record the offer. In an exam, say it aloud so the examiner hears it.

Is this the checklist used in my exam?

No. It is our own list for practice. Check the exam body's published guidance for what it expects.

Sources

- NICE: Suspected cancer, recognition and referral (NG12)
- NHS: Stomach ache
- NHS: Abdominal aortic aneurysm
- WHO: Hand hygiene

Checked 2026-11-13. Fees and rules change, so confirm them with the regulator before you book.