Each organ and system has a characteristic pain referral pattern, as is shown in subsequent chapters. Symptoms that match these visceral (organ) patterns should prompt investigation for other signs.

**Acute and Chronic Pain**

The term *acute pain* describes pain of sudden onset with high intensity and relatively short duration (hours or days). *Chronic pain* appears gradually with lower intensity and a longer duration (weeks or months). Acute pain that appears without trauma, chronic pain that returns in predictable cycles (“comes and goes”), or chronic pain that progresses in intensity suggests systemic pathology.

**Local and Referred Pain**

Local pain stays in a specific region or area of the body. Referred pain occurs in a region that is distant from the source of the pain. Referred pain is more common in systemic pathology, although it can also occur with certain musculoskeletal conditions.