

Abdominal Pain

What is abdominal pain?

When your child complains that his stomach (abdomen) hurts, there could be many causes.

Usually stomachaches are caused by something simple like:

- overeating
- gas pains from drinking too much soda
- other types of indigestion.

Sometimes a stomachache is caused by constipation. A stomachache may also be the first sign of stomach flu (viral gastroenteritis) and vomiting or diarrhea will soon follow.

What causes recurrent abdominal pain?

Stomachaches that keep coming back (recurrent) can have many causes. The most common causes of frequent stomachaches are stress and worries. Over 10% of children have recurrent stomachaches from stress. The pain occurs in the pit of the stomach or near the belly button. The pain is mild but real. If your child keeps getting stomachaches, talk to your doctor.

How long does it last?

With harmless causes, the pain is usually better or gone in 2 hours. With stomach flu, the stomach may hurt before each bout of vomiting or diarrhea. With serious causes, the pain worsens or becomes constant.

How can I take care of my child?

Indigestion or illness: If your child has a stomachache from eating or illness, use the following guidelines for treatment:

- **Rest:** Your child should lie down and rest until he feels better. A warm washcloth or heating pad on the stomach for 20 minutes may speed recovery.
- **Diet:** Avoid giving your child solid foods. Only allow sips of clear fluids. Keep a vomiting pan handy. Younger children are especially likely to refer to nausea as "a stomachache."
- **Sitting on the toilet:** Encourage your child to sit on the toilet and try to pass a BM. This may relieve pain if it is due to constipation or diarrhea.
- **No medicine:** Do not give any medications for stomach cramps unless you have talked with your health care provider. Especially avoid laxatives, enemas, and painkillers.

Stress or worry: If your child has stomachaches from stress or worries and he has already seen a doctor, these suggestions might ease the pain:

- Help your child worry less. Children with recurrent stomachaches tend to be sensitive, serious, conscientious, even model children. This can make them more vulnerable to the normal stresses of life, such as changing schools or moving. Help your youngster talk about events that trigger his pains and how he's going to cope with them.

- Make sure that your youngster doesn't miss any school because of stomachaches. These children have a tendency to want to stay home when the going gets rough.
- Teach your child to use relaxation exercises for mild pains. Have him lie down in a quiet place; take deep, slow breaths; and think about something pleasant. Listening to audiotapes that teach relaxation might help.
- Caution: Your child should have a complete medical checkup before you conclude that recurrent stomachaches are due to worrying too much.

When should I call my child's health care provider?

Call IMMEDIATELY if:

- The pain is severe AND lasts more than 1 hour.
- The pain is constant AND has lasted more than 2 hours.
- The pain comes and goes (cramps) AND lasts more than 24 hours.
- The pain is in the scrotum or testicle.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

Call during office hours if:

- This is a recurrent problem for your child.
- You have other questions or concerns.

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