



Adapted from: Adapted from Barton Schmitt's Pediatric Advisor,  
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## **ABDOMINAL PAIN (Tummy Aches)**

### **Description**

Your child complains that his abdomen (stomach) hurts.

### **Cause**

The causes are numerous. Usually acute abdominal pains are caused by something simple like overeating, gas pains from drinking too much soda pop, or other types of indigestion.

Sometimes a stomach ache signals the onset of viral gastroenteritis (stomach flu), and vomiting or diarrhea soon follow.

### **Expected Course**

With **harmless** causes, the pain is usually better or gone in 2 hours. With gastroenteritis, the cramps may precede each bout of vomiting or diarrhea, or may come and go.

With **serious** causes, the pain worsens or becomes constant.

The most common causes of recurrent abdominal pain are constipation, stress and worries. Over 10% of children have recurrent stomach aches from stress. The pain occurs in the pit of the stomach or near the belly button. The pain is low grade but real.

Pain from constipation comes and goes...referred to as "colicky" pain. It can occasionally feel quite intense. Constipation can often be improved by drinking more water or certain juices and changing the diet.

Here in Colorado, the environment is so **DRY**, that if children do not drink extra fluids during the day, they will **stay** slightly dehydrated. This can lead to stomach aches, headaches, and chronic constipation.

Treatment of constipation takes time and patience and sometimes a little creativity when finding less constipating options for your child to eat. Concentrate on increasing vegetables and fruits. Most vegetables can be combined in small amounts with fruits and probiotic yogurt in a delicious smoothie to drink. Probiotics have been proven to help improve both constipation and diarrhea.

Try to significantly decrease starchy/fried/fast foods or potatoes, cheese, peanut butter, and bread. These can all contribute to constipation. Try medicines only if changing the diet over several weeks does not change the quality and timing of bowel movements. Recurrent stomach aches can have numerous causes and deserve medical attention.

## Home Care

1. Rest: Your child should lie down and rest until he feels better. A warm washcloth or heating pad (LOW setting) on the abdomen for 20 minutes may speed recovery.
2. Diet: Avoid giving your child solid foods or dairy products; permit only sips of clear fluids such as Pedialyte® or popsicles for vomiting. Keep a vomiting pan handy. Younger children are especially likely to refer to nausea as "a stomach ache."

For Constipation, try to change your child's diet and fluids as outlined above.

3. Sitting on the toilet (for constipation): Encourage sitting on the toilet regularly (usually 30 minutes after eating) and trying to pass a BM. This may relieve chronic pain.
4. Common mistakes in treating abdominal pain

Do not give any medications for stomach cramps unless you have talked with your physician. Especially avoid laxatives, enemas, and painkillers.

### 5. The worried stomach

If your child has been evaluated by a physician and has stomach aches from worries, these suggestions might ease the pains:

- 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 stomach aches. These children have a tendency to want to stay home when the going gets rough. Help them be consistent at school while you and your doctor get to the bottom of the issue.

- 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. This is a "diagnosis of exclusion," meaning, all the usual medical causes have been ruled out.

### **CALL YOUR PHYSICIAN IMMEDIATELY IF:**

- Abdominal Pain is severe AND lasts more than 1 hour.
- The pain is constant AND has lasted more than 2 hours and not relieved by going to the bathroom.
- The pain comes and goes AND lasts more than 24 hours.
- The pain is in the scrotum or testicle.
- Your child starts acting very sick.

### **NON-EMERGENCY TUMMY ACHE:**

#### **Call your Physician During Office Hours (6 a.m. to 4 p.m.) if:**

- Tummy aches are recurrent and chronic problem.
- You have other questions or concerns about bowel movements, diet, or activity.