

Abdominal pain (stomach ache)

When your child says that his stomach (abdomen) hurts, there could be many causes. Stomach aches may be caused by something simple like:

- overeating
- cramps from swallowed gas or eating food that can cause colic.

Sometimes a stomach ache is caused by constipation.

A stomach ache may also be the first sign of gastroenteritis, and vomiting or diarrhoea will soon follow. Sometimes stomach aches are caused by problems such as appendicitis or urine infections. Your doctor will have checked your child for this.

Stomach aches that happen often

Some children get stomach aches often.

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

How long does the pain last?

Often the pain is better or gone in 2 hours. With gastroenteritis, the stomach may hurt before each bout of vomiting or diarrhoea. 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 stomach ache from eating or illness:

- **Rest:** Your child should lie down and rest until he feels better. A warm towel or heat pad on the stomach for 20 minutes may help.
- **Diet:** Avoid giving your child solid foods, give clear fluids.
- Keep a bowl handy in case your child **vomits**. Younger children may say they have pain in their

tummy when they feel like vomiting (nausea).

- **Sitting on the toilet:** Encourage your child to sit on the toilet and try to pass poo. This may relieve pain if it is due to constipation or diarrhoea.
- **Pain relief:** You can give paracetamol (eg Panadol) or ibuprofen (eg Nurofen) to help with pain. Sometimes a warm heat pack or massage will help to relieve the pain
- Do not give any **medicines** such as laxatives or enemas for stomach cramps unless you have talked with your health care provider.

Stress or worry

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

- Look for ways to help your child worry less. Children with recurrent stomach aches tend to be sensitive, serious, caring and 'good' children. This can make it harder for them to manage the normal stresses of life, such as changing schools, bullying or moving. Help your child talk about events that trigger his pains and



how he's going to cope with them.

- Make sure that your child doesn't miss any school because of stomach aches. These children often 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. Gentle massage of the tummy may help.
- **Caution:** Your child should have a complete check-up by a doctor to be sure that recurrent stomach aches are due to worrying too much.

When should I get my child seen by a doctor?

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.
- Your child vomiting a lot especially if it contains bile (yellow –green) or blood.
- The pain is in the scrotum or testicle.
- Your child seems ill.

During office hours if:

- If the pain keeps coming back.
- You have other questions or concerns.

For more information

Paediatric Emergency Department

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North Adelaide SA 5006
Tel 08 8161 7044
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<http://www.wch.sa.gov.au>

Non-English speaking: for information in languages other than English, call the interpreting and Translating Centre and ask them to call Department of Health. This service is available at no cost to you, contact (08) 8226 1990.

Reviewed January 2019

