

Abdominal Pain - Stress Related

Definition

- Pain or discomfort in the stomach (abdomen or belly)
- The stomach pains occur when your child is worried about something
- This is often called the "worried stomach" TEST

Health Information

Symptoms

- The pain occurs in the pit of the stomach or near the belly button.
- The pain is mild to moderate.
- The pain is real but harmless.

Pain Scale

- **Mild:** Your child feels pain and tells you about it. But, the pain does not keep your child from any normal activities. School, play and sleep are not changed.
- **Moderate:** The pain keeps your child from doing some normal activities. It may wake him or her up from sleep.
- **Severe:** The pain is very bad. It keeps your child from doing all normal activities.

Causes

- The most common cause of frequent stomach pains is stress and worries.
- These children tend to be sensitive and very serious. They often are model children.
- This can make them more at risk to the normal stresses of life.

Recurrent Stomach Pains: How to Diagnose the Cause

- Stomach pain has many causes. Most are harmless or even normal. A few of them are serious.
- Any child with recurrent stomach pains needs a complete exam by their doctor.
- If your child has not been seen about their stomach pain, make an appointment.

Care Advice

1. Overview:

- Over 10% of children have a "worried stomach".
- Your child can learn to control it.
- Here is some care advice that should help.

2. Treatment of Stress-related Stomach Pain:

- To treat the pain, help your child get very relaxed. Try some of these techniques:
- **Breathing exercise.** Taking slow deep breaths will help. Make your belly go up and down with each breath.
- **Relaxation exercise.** Lay down in a quiet place. Close your eyes. Try to relax all the muscles in the body.
- **Guided imagery.** Close your eyes. Pretend you are somewhere very peaceful and happy. It could be a beach or a forest.
- **Calming music.** Listening to peaceful music or CDs that teach how to relax might also help.

3. **Prevention of Stomach Pain Triggers:**

- Help your child talk about events that trigger the stomach pain.
- Talk to your child about how to cope with these the next time around.
- Help your child worry less about things he or she can't control.

4. **Prevention of Stress:**

- **Sleep.** Teach your child the importance of getting enough sleep. This should be at least 8 hours each night. Stress is easier to handle if you get adequate sleep.
- **Exercise.** Exercise releases chemicals that protect from stress. At least go for a walk every day.
- **Fun.** Do something fun and relaxing every day. Examples are music, reading, and talking with friends.

5. **What to Expect:**

- If your child can relax, the pain may be gone in 30 minutes. If not, the pain may last 2-3 hours.
- A "worried stomach" won't go away. Many adults have it.
- The only way to reduce attacks is to learn to deal with normal stressors.

6. **Return to School:**

- Make sure that your child doesn't miss any school because of stomach pains.
- Stressed children tend to want to stay home when the going gets rough.

Call Your Doctor If

- Stomach ache becomes worse than usual
- Stomach ache lasts longer than usual
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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