

FACTSHEET

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Abdominal pain

What is it?

Abdominal pain is very common in children and there are many causes. Most abdominal pain is not due to a serious illness, and children usually get better on their own.

What causes it?

Pain can come from any structure in the abdomen including the stomach, bowel, kidneys, bladder and other organs. Even severe abdominal pain does not always mean your child is suffering from a serious illness. Severe pain can be associated with mild illnesses such as wind pain from drinking or eating too much or cramping from constipation or a viral infection. Some children get abdominal pain as a result of stress.

The exact cause of pain is often not found, and will often get better by itself with simple pain relief and time. There are however, some serious illnesses that can start with mild abdominal pain.

What are the symptoms like?

Abdominal pain can happen suddenly or develop slowly. Your infant or young child may cry and pull their knees up towards their chest when they have an abdominal pain. Nonetheless, these symptoms may also be unrelated to abdominal pain. They may also have other symptoms that are associated with the cause of the pain, such as vomiting, diarrhoea and/or fever.

When should you contact your local doctor immediately?

If:

- the pain is severe and lasts for a long period (such as over several hours) made worse by movement or wakes your child up from sleep at night.
- the pain returns often and regularly.
- 'cramping pains' that come and go.
- your child has a fever (higher than 38.5oC).
- your child has a rash that isn't getting better.
- your child appears very pale.
- your child has persistent vomiting or if any vomit is green or contains blood.
- your child's poo becomes black or red (which could be blood).
- your child becomes very tired or drowsy.
- your child has severe pain elsewhere.
- your child has swelling of the abdomen or lump(s) in the groin.
- your child has pain when they pass urine or if the urine contains blood.
- the pain is after an abdominal injury (such as a sports injury).
- in boys: there is pain in the scrotum or testicle or the groin area.
- your child does not seem to be getting better.

What can you do for your child at home?

- See if your child will lie down & rest.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of clear fluids (give small amounts frequently).
- If they don't want to eat, don't force them.
- Encourage your child to sit on the toilet; sometimes doing a poo helps the pain.

Often abdominal pain will get better all by itself, with time and simple pain relief.

Do not give your child any medications other than simple pain relief medication, such as paracetamol, without first talking to your doctor. Give your child the dose that is recommended on the packaging for their age and weight.

Remember:

- Abdominal pain is very common in childhood.
- The cause for the pain (sometimes even when it is severe pain) is often not found.
- Encourage plenty of clear fluids and do not force your child to eat.
- Do not give your child any medications without first talking to your doctor.
- Contact your local doctor immediately if you are concerned.
- For afterhours GP help, call Healthdirect 1800 022 222