

Let's Talk About...

Abdominal pain

What is abdominal pain?

Pain in the abdomen (belly) is common and can be caused by issues with different organs in the abdomen, including the stomach, intestines, kidneys, bladder, gallbladder, liver, pancreas, spleen, nerves, ovaries, uterus, and appendix. It may be hard to know exactly which organs are causing the abdominal pain.

What can cause abdominal pain?

Your child's abdominal pain may commonly be caused by:

- Constipation [con-stih-PAY-shun], or not being able to poop
- Gastroenteritis [GAS-troh-en-tur-IY-tis], an intestinal infection that causes nausea (feeling the need to vomit), vomiting, fever, and diarrhea
- Stress
- A urinary tract infection (UTI)
- Problems digesting food or eating food that had bacteria in it (often called food poisoning)
- Food allergies or sensitivities
- Diarrhea [dy-uh-REE-uh], or watery, frequent stool (poop)
- Bowel (intestine) problems like a blocked intestine or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)
- Appendicitis [ah-PEN-dih-SY-tus], an inflamed appendix (usually caused by an infection)

How does the doctor know what is causing my child's abdominal pain?

Your child's healthcare provider will ask about your child's symptoms and how long they've had abdominal pain, including what makes it feel better and what makes it worse. They will do a good physical exam of your child's belly. Other tests are often not needed.



How is abdominal pain treated?

Your child's healthcare provider may give your child some medicine or have them avoid some foods to help their stomach feel better. They may recommend a stool softener or diarrhea medicine if bowel problems are causing pain.

If your child's abdominal pain is caused by stress, the healthcare provider may suggest some ways to help your child relax or have them meet with a psychologist [sy-CAHL-oh-jist], a doctor who can help them cope with changes.

If your child has appendicitis, they will need surgery to remove the appendix, called an appendectomy [APP-end-EK-toh-mee]. This is a common procedure that may require staying 1 to 2 days in the hospital.

Did you know?

Gastroenteritis (often called the stomach flu) is the most common cause of belly pain in children, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians.

How can I help my child prevent abdominal pain?

To help prevent belly pain in the future, have your child:

- Poop 1 to 2 times every day
- Stop eating when they're full
- Avoid foods they're sensitive to
- Try not to eat right before bedtime
- Eat lots of fruits and vegetables to prevent constipation
- Drink lots of water
- Wash their hands often, especially before eating

When should I call my doctor?

Call your child's doctor immediately if your child has.

- A fever
- Vomiting and nausea that does not stop
- Yellowish skin
- A swollen abdomen
- Bloody stools (poop)
- Severe pain or tenderness in their abdomen
- Been losing weight

Questions for my doctor

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