



Abdominal Pain in Children

Constipation

[Constipation](#) often is blamed for abdominal pain, and while it's rarely a problem in younger infants, it's a common cause of pain in older children, especially in the lower part of the abdomen. When a child's diet lacks plenty of fluids, fresh fruits and vegetables, and fiber rich in whole grains, bowel problems are more likely to occur. For more information: see handout on constipation.

Urinary Tract Infection (UTI)

Urinary tract infections (UTI) are much more common in one- to five-year-old girls than in younger children. UTIs produce [discomfort in the abdomen and the bladder area](#), as well as some pain and burning when urinating. These children also may urinate more frequently and possibly wet the bed. However, the infection usually does not produce a fever. If your child complains of these symptoms, take her to the pediatrician, who will examine her and check her urine. If an infection is present, an antibiotic will be prescribed, which will eliminate both the infection and the abdominal pain.

Strep Throat

Strep throat is a throat infection caused by bacteria called streptococci. It occurs frequently in children over three years of age. The [symptoms](#) and signs include a sore throat, fever, and abdominal pain. There may be some vomiting and headache as well. Your pediatrician will want to examine your child and swab her throat to check for strep bacteria. If the results are positive for strep, your child will need to be treated with an antibiotic. For more information: see handout on strep.

Appendicitis

Appendicitis is very rare in children under age three and uncommon under the age of five. When it does occur, the first sign is often a complaint of constant stomachache in the center of the abdomen, and later the pain moves down and over to the right side.

Lead poisoning

Lead poisoning most often occurs in toddlers living in an older house where lead-based paint has been used. Children in this age group may eat small chips of paint off the walls and

woodwork. The lead is then stored in their bodies and can create many serious health problems. Parents also should be aware of toys or other products with unacceptable lead content. Symptoms of lead poisoning include not only abdominal pain, but also constipation, irritability (the child is fussy, crying, difficult to satisfy), lethargy (she is sleepy, doesn't want to play, has a poor appetite), and convulsions. If your child is exposed to lead paint, has eaten paint chips or been exposed to toys with cracking, peeling, or chipping paint and has any of the above symptoms, call your pediatrician. She can order a blood test for lead and advise you as to what else needs to be done.

Other Causes

Milk allergy is a reaction to the protein in milk, and can produce cramping abdominal pain, often accompanied by vomiting, diarrhea, and skin rash.

Emotional upset in school-age children sometimes causes recurrent abdominal pain that has no other obvious cause. Although this pain rarely occurs before age five, it can happen to a younger child who is under unusual stress. The first clue is pain that tends to come and go over a period of more than a week, often associated with activity that is stressful or unpleasant. In addition, there are no other associated findings or complaints (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, coughing, lethargy or weakness, urinary tract symptoms, sore throat, or flulike symptoms). There also may be a family history of this type of illness. Finally, your child probably will act either quieter or noisier than usual and have trouble expressing her thoughts or feelings. If this type of behavior occurs with your child, find out if there's something troubling her at home or school or with siblings, relatives, or friends. Has she recently lost a close friend or a pet? Has there been a [death](#) of a family member, or the divorce or separation of her parents?

Your pediatrician can suggest ways to help your child talk about her troubles. For example, he may advise you to use toys or games to help the child act out her problems. If you need additional assistance, the pediatrician may refer you to a child therapist, psychologist, or psychiatrist.

Adapted from The American Academy of Pediatrics (2011) at www.healthychildren.org