

Abdominal Pain - Stress Related

Definition

- Recurrent bouts of stomach aches that relate to stress.
- They occur when a child is worried about something.
- This is often called a "worried stomach."
- This medical diagnosis was made by a doctor after seeing your child.

Health Information

Symptoms

- The pain or discomfort occurs in the pit of the stomach or near the belly button.
- The pain is mild to moderate.
- The pain is real but not harmful to your child's health.
- Mainly occurs in school age children and young adults.

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.
- Children with stress-related symptoms tend to be more sensitive than others.
- Their bodies react more intensely to the normal stresses in life.

Normal Anxiety Can Cause Physical Symptoms

- Anxiety is a normal human response to stressful life events.
- It also protects us from real dangers.
- All people feel anxious at times. It is a normal emotion that will always be part of you. Anxiety also causes physical symptoms. The symptoms are telling you the body is under stress and needs to slow down.
- The symptoms can be managed so they don't keep you from doing normal things.

Medical Diagnosis: How It is Made

- The diagnosis of recurrent abdominal pains from stress should only be made by a doctor.
- It is based on a complete medical history and physical exam.
- Your doctor may also do some lab tests to check for other causes.

Care Advice

1. **Key Points**
 - Over 10% of children have a "worried stomach" that reacts more to stress.
 - Your child can learn to control the stomach aches and other physical symptoms anxiety causes.
 - Here is some care advice that should help.
2. **Treatment for Pain Attacks - Relax Your Body and Mind**
 - To get over 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. Do it with your child.
 - **Relaxation exercise.** Lay down in a quiet place. Close your eyes. Try to relax all the muscles in your body.
 - **Guided imagery.** Close your eyes. Pretend you are somewhere very peaceful and happy. It could be a beach or a forest.
 - **Calming music.** Listen to peaceful music or guided relaxation apps.
3. **Talk About Triggers of Stomach Pain**
 - Help your child talk about events that trigger the stomach pain.
 - Help them talk about what worries them.
 - Help them plan how to cope with these triggers the next time they occur.
 - Help your child worry less about things they can't control.
4. **Prevention - Reduce Future 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 enough sleep.
 - **Exercise.** Exercise every day. Being active helps your body deal with stress. Try to go for a walk every day.
 - **Fun.** Do something fun and relaxing every day. Examples are music, reading, and talking with friends.
5. **Go to School**
 - Make sure that your child doesn't miss any school because of stomach pains in the morning.
 - Stressed children tend to want to stay home when the going gets rough.
 - Every day at home makes it harder to go back.
6. **What to Expect**
 - If your child can relax, the pain often goes away in 30 minutes. If not, it may last 2 to 3 hours.
 - The tendency to have stomach pain when worried may not go away. Many adults continue to have them.
 - The only way to reduce attacks is to learn to deal with normal stresses.

Call Your Doctor If

- Stomach aches become worse
- Stomach aches keep your child from doing normal things
- Your child develops other symptoms not related to anxiety
- You think your child needs to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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