**Abdominal Pain in Children**

**Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)**
This is a common problem affecting 1 in 5 people in their lifetime. It is more common in adults but can also affect children. It usually causes crampy tummy aches with bloating or wind and sometimes diarrhoea or constipation. Pain may improve after passing wind or doing a poo. IBS is bothersome but not serious and tends to come and go, being worse at more stressful periods in life.

The following things can help with irritable bowel syndrome:-
- Keep a diary to see if there are certain foods that make it worse
- Have regular meals and encourage your child to take time when eating. Try to avoid missing meals or leaving long gaps between eating
- Try linseed (flaxseed) up to 1 tablespoon a day
- Make sure your child drinks plenty of water
- Avoid fizzy drinks
- Reduce processed or re-cooked foods which can contain high levels of starch that resists digestion in the bowel
- Limit fresh fruit to three portions a day
- If your child has diarrhoea, avoid sorbitol, an artificial sweetener found in sugar-free sweets
- Oats (such as oat-based breakfast cereal or porridge)
- You could try probiotic drinks or yoghurts for a month to see if they help
- Peppermint oil can help (for example in peppermint tea)
- If these do not work, medications that can help include treatment for constipation, medicines to relax the bowel during cramps and medicines to help the bowel process smoothly.

**Non-specific or functional abdominal pain**
If this term is used, it means serious conditions have been ruled out and no cause has been found for your child’s abdominal pain. This is common in children and pain often gradually improves over a number of months or years. The important things are to make sure there are no signs of serious illness and that your child is growing well. Try to avoid using pain killers too often, try to make sure your child eats, sleeps and exercises well and if symptoms change, go back to your doctor.

**Abdominal pain - Important Points**
- Tummy ache is common in children and a serious cause is not usually found
- Seek medical advice if your child has any of these:-
  - Severe pain
  - Green vomit
  - Blood in their sick or poo
  - Weight loss or poor growth
  - Symptoms of a urine infection

Where can I find more information?  
www.nhs.uk/conditions

Who can I contact if I am worried?  
Community Nursing Team: 01204 463939  
(Patients with a Bolton GP only)

Ask your GP for more information or for the contact details of your local team

F5 Ward – 01204 390715
E5 Ward – 01204 390405

We recognise that not everyone will find this document easy to read. We can arrange for large print, audio tape versions and for summaries or explanations in other languages. Please call 01204 390193 if we can help.

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What is abdominal pain?

Pain in the tummy area is common in children and does not usually have a serious cause. This leaflet explains some of the commonest causes of abdominal pain in children.

Appendicitis

Appendicitis typically starts with a pain in the middle of the tummy. Within hours the pain travels to the lower right-hand side, where the appendix usually lies, and becomes constant and severe. Pressing on this area, coughing or walking, may make the pain worse. Children may lose their appetite, feel sick or have diarrhoea. There is often a mild fever. If appendicitis is suspected, blood tests can be helpful. An ultrasound can be carried out but this is often not helpful as it is difficult to see the appendix through gas in the bowel (guts). X-rays and other scans are not usually helpful. If blood tests are normal, there is no fever and an examination does not find signs of appendicitis, this makes it unlikely that appendicitis is the cause. If appendicitis is suspected, an operation may be needed.

Gastroenteritis

This is an infection, most often caused by a virus. There is often vomiting or diarrhoea but this may be mild and sometimes pain is the only sign. It usually settles within 5-7 days.

Mesenteric adenitis

This is pain caused by swelling of the glands in the tummy. It is most often caused by viral illnesses or bacteria in food. 1 in 5 children will have swollen glands in other areas like the neck and other signs may include a red throat or eardrums, fever and a runny nose. The pain can be severe enough to be confused with appendicitis and around 1 in 5 children who are taken to hospital to have their appendix out are found to have this diagnosis instead. No treatment other than pain relief is needed and the pain usually settles within a few days and almost always within 2 weeks.

Constipation

Constipation is a very common cause of abdominal pain in children. Most constipation in children is caused by children avoiding doing a poo as they are too busy or because it hurts their bottom. Parents may not always know their child is constipated. Signs include not pooping every day, straining or difficulty doing a poo, large or hard poos and soiling in underwear. Sometimes poo can be felt when the tummy is examined. If you think your child may be constipated, please ask your GP for information and treatment. A trial of constipation treatment is sometimes recommended if another cause cannot be found for abdominal pain as constipation is very common and the treatment is effective and safe.

Urinary tract infection (cystitis or kidney infection)

Infections in the urine can cause tummy ache. This can be ruled out with a clean urine sample which can be difficult to get in children.

Abdominal migraines

Abdominal migraines cause pain in the tummy that keeps coming in attacks lasting between 1 hour and 3 days with no pain in between. Children may feel sick or vomit during the attack and may avoid noise or light. There is often a close family member with migraines. A trial of migraine treatment may be helpful.

Coeliac disease

This is when the body's immune system reacts to wheat in the diet. It may cause long standing tummy pain with or without diarrhoea which may be associated with eating wheat. A blood test can rule out more than 99% of cases.

Inflammatory bowel disease (IBD)

IBD includes conditions such as Crohn's Disease and Ulcerative Colitis where the body's immune system attacks the bowel (gut). It is more common in adults but can sometimes be diagnosed in children. It is more common if it runs in the family. There will usually be other signs such as mouth ulcers, weight loss or poor growth, blood or mucus (slime) in the poo or diarrhoea. Blood tests or a poo test called faecal calprotectin will usually show some signs of the illness.