Abdominal Pain

Call the doctor if you think your infant has stomach pain AND any of these symptoms:

- Fever greater than 100.4°F. (See Fever section)
- Vomiting (not just spitting up)
- Your infant’s stomach looks or feels swollen
- Black or maroon-colored (bloody) stools

**“Stomach aches”**

Infants: It is difficult to know when infants have abdominal pain because they cannot talk to you about what is wrong.

- Infants with abdominal pain may be fussy and crying.
- They may bring their knees up to the chest as a sign that they are in pain.

Children and Teenagers:

There are many causes of stomach pain in children and teenagers. Here is a list of things you should be concerned about.

**Call the doctor if your child:**

- Has stomach pain located in the lower abdomen, on the right side.
- Has stomach pain that lasts longer than 6 hours and is getting worse.
- Has pain with peeing or blood in their urine.
- Has a sore throat and stomach pain.
- Has a fever.
- Has a skin rash.
- Is a boy and has pain in one or both testicles.
- Is a girl and has missed (is late for) her menstrual period.
- Is a girl and has vaginal discharge.
- Is not eating or drinking, or has very little pee.

(See sections on Vomiting and Diarrhea for more information about dehydration)

**The Facts:**

Abdominal pain (“belly pain” or “stomach ache”) in children is common and can have many different causes. The pain often goes away by itself in just a couple of hours. Usually stomach aches are caused by simple things:

- Gas pains
- Eating too much
- Stress and worry
- Constipation: holding in bowel movements (poops)
- Indigestion: not being able to process food

Other possible causes of belly pain may depend on the age of the child.

Dehydration

Dehydration occurs when the body doesn’t have enough water to function properly. A child’s body can quickly lose a lot of water and salt through vomiting or diarrhea, especially if the child is not drinking enough because she does not feel well. Some signs that your child is becoming dehydrated are:

- Your child isn’t peeing as often as usual (needs fewer diaper changes or trips to the bathroom).
- Your child’s urine is a darker color than usual and has a strong smell.
- Your child’s breathing and heartbeat are faster than normal (put the palm of your hand on your child’s chest to feel the heartbeat).
- The soft spot on your baby’s head is sunken in.
- Your child’s mouth and tongue look dry or cracked.
- Your child is crying, but you do not see any tears.
- Your child is acting confused or doesn’t know where he/she is.

If your child has any of these signs of dehydration, call your child’s doctor.

**What can I do if my child is vomiting?**

1. Watch for signs of dehydration when she has stopped vomiting.
2. Offer small amounts of clear fluids for 8 hours (no solid food or milk).
3. For infants less than one year:
   - Pedialyte® (ask your doctor how much to give)
   - Apple or white grape juice, Gatorade® popsicles, and Pedialyte® are good options.
   - Start slowly. Give her 1-2 tablespoons of fluid every half-hour.
   - Once she has kept these liquids down for 2-3 hours without vomiting, you can give increasing amounts of fluids.
4. For infants 6 months to one year:
   - Give cereal and progress slowly back to a normal feeding schedule.
   - For children older than one year:
     - Start with bland foods such as crackers and progress to a normal diet within 24 hours.

**Vomiting**

Vomiting (“throwing up,” “stomach flu”) is very common in childhood and is usually caused by a virus. A viral stomach illness typically causes vomiting and diarrhea, and lasts 24-48 hours (but can last longer). Children will sometimes have a slightly elevated temperature.

Viral stomach illnesses usually go away on their own with time, rest, and plenty of fluids. It is important for your child to drink lots of liquids when she is feeling ill and vomiting. Children lose a lot of water and salts with vomiting and diarrhea, which can lead to dehydration.

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**What can I do to help a child with constipation?**

- Increase the fiber in your child’s diet by offering more fruits, vegetables, and bran (flake cereal).
- Drink more water and other liquids.
- Encourage your child to be more active (walking, running and playing).
- Talk to your doctor before trying any medicines like laxatives or stool softeners.

**Constipation**

Constipation occurs when bowel movements (BM) are difficult or painful to pass. Children differ in the number of BMs they normally have each day. Here are 5 things you should be concerned about.

**Call the doctor if your child:**

- Has blood in the vomit (or vomit looks like “coffee grounds”).
- Has vomit that is dark green or pea-colored.
- Is projectile vomiting (vomiting across the room).
- Has repeated, forceful vomiting, usually in infants (more than just spitting up).
- Has severe abdominal pain.

Remember, most practices have a doctor on call during the times the office isn’t open. Call the office’s main number for information.

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