

Chronic Abdominal Pain in Children

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Definition

Three or more episodes of abdominal pain over at least 3 months duration that is severe enough to affect daily activities in a child over 3 years of age

Incidence

- Common
- 10-14% of children have abdominal pain
- Most common between 4-14 years of age
- 5-10 % have identifiable organic cause
- Girls maybe more affected than boys
- Large psychological component
- Possible link to socioeconomic groups

Aetiology

- Common things are common
- Probable
 - Constipation
 - Functional Abdominal Pain
 - Irritable bowel syndrome
 - Abdominal migraine
- Possible eg coeliac, inflammatory bowel disease
- Other non abdominal causes
 - Most important here acutely is Diabetes



Red Flags

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- Faltering growth or weight loss
- Gastrointestinal bleeding
- Blood or mucus mixed in with stool
- Chronic severe diarrhoea or vomiting
- Unexplained fever for more than 14 days
- Family History of Inflammatory bowel disease
- Abnormal clinical examination: pubertal delay, anal fissure, organomegaly, extra intestinal manifestation or jaundice
- Urinary symptoms/back/flank pain
- Jaundice

History

- The nature of pain
- Duration (more than 3 months)
- Diet
- Bowel Habit
- Stressors at home or school
- Associated symptoms such as rashes, fever, ulcers
- Remember association with long term abdominal pain and sexual abuse



Always ask about the red flags

Investigations

- Avoid!
 - Should only be considered if any red flags or any clinical signs
- Most helpful in absence of above is Coeliac screen
 - Anti-transglutaminase type 2
 - IgA

Management

- Treat constipation
- If after exclusion of other causes the diagnosis is Functional abdominal pain

Functional Abdominal Pain

Explore stressors

Reassure family

Consider treatment with:

Simple Analgesia

Lactobacillus (Reference 1)

Peppermint oil –not licenced <15years -Peppermint tea is alternative in younger age

Or trial :

Hyoscine butylbromine (“buscopan” – not licenced <6years restricted evidence base)

Mebeverine (NB not licenced <10years, restricted evidence base)

Key Messages

- Common
- Diagnosis relies on good history and examination
- If any investigation do a coeliac screen
- Treat underlying constipation
 - Remember can have overflow diarrhoea
- Can require a lot of reassurance
- Call a friend if any concerns!

For same/next day Paediatric advice from Paediatric consultant:

- **Evelina** : Phone : 07557 159092 (11am-7pm Mon-Fri)
- **Email**: general.paediatrics@nhs.net (answer within 24hrs on weekdays)
- **KCH** : **Phone**: 02032996613 (option 3), (8.30am – midnight weekdays, 8 30am - 8pm weekend)
- **Email** :via Choose and Book for a response within 24 hrs Mon-Fri.

References

- <http://patient.info/doctor/recurrent-abdominal-pain-in-children>
- <http://ep.bmj.com/content/98/1/32.full.pdf+html>