Vernon Pediatrics

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FUNCTIONAL ABDOMINAL PAIN

Definition

Functional abdominal pain is very common and is one of the most common explanations for abdominal pain in children. The term "functional" refers to the fact that there is no medical cause found for the pain. This does not mean that the pain they are experiencing isn't real. It is not well understood, but may be due to extra sensitivity of the digestive organs. The pain can be made worse by stress or anxiety. It can often have a big impact on a child's schooling and activities.

Diagnosis

Functional abdominal pain is a diagnosis that your doctor will make after asking many questions about the pain, doing a complete examination of your child, and often ordering basic tests to screen for medical causes of abdominal pain (such as inflammation or celiac disease). Children with this diagnosis have normal growth and a normal physical exam. Lab tests, X-rays, other imaging studies, extensive lab tests and endoscopy are only recommended for children whose history, exam or basic lab results do not fit with the diagnosis of functional pain.

Treatment

Your doctor may recommend treating constipation or lactose intolerance if they feel either of these conditions is contributing to the pain.

Treating any stress or anxiety that your child has will often improve the pain. You and your pediatrician can discuss a plan to manage these issues.

While your doctor, family, and child are working through this problem it is important to ensure the pain isn't controlling your

Vernon Pediatrics

child's life. Your child can learn strategies to avoid focusing on the pain. Parents

should observe behaviour rather than asking about the pain to determine their level of pain. It is important to prevent the pain from becoming a reason to miss school, miss after school activities, or change family plans. Even if the pain persists, it is reassuring to learn that this is a common condition and it is not dangerous.

Some children find that a diet which avoids ingredients that are known to cause GI upset can be helpful