

Family Medicine Clerkship Plain Language Summary Template

Title: Behavioral therapy to treat functional abdominal pain in children

Name: Gina Ng, MS3

Plain Language Summary:

What is functional abdominal pain?

Functional abdominal pain is pain that is not caused by a physical disease and is not life-threatening. It is very common in children. The pain in the belly is still there even though all serious causes have been ruled out. The reason for the pain is often the digestive system, or the intestines. The intestines have many nerves. The nerves can be influenced by things other than disease, like stress and feelings. Even though the pain is not caused by a physical disease, the pain is still very real to the child.

The pain can happen if there are things the child enjoys that happen when they have pain. For example, a child may like special attention from parents or staying home from school. The reactions of parents to the child's pain are also very important. Some reactions, such as being very concerned and paying very special attention to the child can encourage the pain.

So what can be done if a child has this pain?

The good news is that most children improve over time, no matter what type of treatment they have. For children who are not getting better, behavioral therapy can help.

Treatments focus on helping the child feel better. This can be done with behavior changes. Seeing a behavior therapist can help to learn new behaviors. Learning things like relaxation exercises and how to cope with pain can help. It can also help if the parent learns new behaviors. For example, when parents pay more attention to healthy actions and less to sick actions it can help. It can also help if the parent shows less concern and more confidence that the child will get better.

Parents and children do not need to spend very much time with this treatment for it to help. Spending only a few hours with a behavior therapist can be enough. Your child's doctor can suggest therapists near you.

Additional Resources:

American College of Gastroenterology – Functional abdominal pain in children
<http://www.acg.gi.org/patients/gihealth/functionalab.asp>

UpToDate: Patient Information: Chronic abdominal pain in children and adolescents
<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/patient-information-chronic-abdominal-pain-in-children-and-adolescents>

Key Words:

Functional abdominal pain

Recurrent abdominal pain

Children

Adolescent

Behavioral therapy

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Family Medicine Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up-to-date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.