Abdominal pain is common in children, though the cause can be a mystery. It’s referred to as a “functional” pain, because it’s not the result of an underlying disease or organ issue. If this is something your child experiences, you can talk to your doctor about diet, reducing stress and other ways to treat abdominal pains.

**What is functional abdominal pain?**
Functional abdominal pain occurs when there is pain at or around the belly button, but no other symptoms and no underlying disease. It is true pain and often can be quite severe. Your child’s doctor may diagnose it during a thorough evaluation in the office. Your doctor might also suggest additional tests to confirm a diagnosis.

**What causes the pain?**
No one knows for certain, but there are different theories. Most experts believe the pain is caused by overly sensitive nerves and how the signals are read by the brain. These can cause your child to perceive pain from normal body functions, such as intestinal contractions that help move food along or gas bubbles. Your child might also be sensitive to mild irritants, such as certain foods or spices. Sometimes stress, anxiety or depression may cause or increase pain signals to the brain.

**How is it treated?**
Here are some of possible options to discuss with your child’s doctor:

- Reassurance and education: It often helps to explain to your child why he or she is having pain, and that this pain is not the result of a serious medical problem.
- Diet: It is important to get adequate fiber in your child’s diet and to avoid certain foods that can be mild irritants.
- Stress reduction: Address any stressors at home or at school that might be contributing to your child’s pain. Helping your child practice relaxation techniques also could help ease the pain.
- Medicine: Usually no medication is needed. Sometimes, acid-blockers help. Medications called “anti-spasmodics” can help decrease the abnormal contractions in the intestines. These medicines can be taken to prevent episodes or to relieve pain once it has occurred.

**What are the warning signs of other abdominal pain issues?**
Some warning signs you should watch for include:

- Weight loss
- Vomiting
- Waking up at night because of pain or to have a bowel movement
- Multiple episodes of diarrhea per day
- Blood in the stool
- Recurrent fevers (higher than 100°)

These symptoms are sometimes, but not always, associated with more serious stomach and intestinal problems. Share these symptoms with your child’s doctor, who may suggest additional testing.