Stomachache Relief

Abdominal pain has many causes. Only rarely is the cause serious. The general information section of Pediatric Planet has more information about when to be concerned. If your child’s physician has determined that there is not a serious cause of the abdominal pain there are a number of over-the-counter medications that may be helpful. The key to getting benefit is choosing the right medication for the job. Having some opinion from your child’s doctor regarding the probable cause of the discomfort is a good start. Constipation may cause abdominal pain when gas is trapped behind blockages of hard stool. In this case see the constipation relief section of the medicine cabinet for more information. Abdominal pain may also accompany lactose intolerance. If your child is lactose intolerant avoidance of milk products and use of supplemental lactase (Dairy-ease, Lactaid), when necessary, will be helpful.

Active ingredients:

- **Aluminum Hydroxide** (solitary active ingredient in some Amphojel, one of several active ingredients in some Gaviscon, Maalox, and Mylanta products).
  
  Aluminum hydroxide is an effective neutralizer of stomach acid although it does not work as quickly as calcium carbonate. It has a more prolonged effect, however, and does not cause bloating. Only small amounts of aluminum are absorbed into the blood stream, those with normal kidneys will excrete the aluminum in the urine. Unlike calcium, however, aluminum has no useful purpose to the body. In those with kidney problems aluminum may build up in the body causing osteoporosis, muscle weakness, and brain injury. There is some evidence linking aluminum to Alzheimer’s. It should not be taken by persons with kidney disease and should be taken at least 2 hours after any other medications.

- **Calcium Carbonate** (solitary active ingredient in some Alka-mints, Maalox, Mylanta, 3M-Titralac, and Tums products, as well as in some Caltrate, and Os-cal products (non-marketed as antacids); one of several active ingredients in some Di-gel, Marblen, Mylanta, Rolaids, and 3M-Titralac products).
  
  Calcium carbonate is an antacid which rapidly dissolves to neutralize stomach acid. There is some concern however that the calcium then may cause the release of additional acid, and that the carbonate results in excess gas. If your child’s abdominal pain is not caused by stomach acid, this medication will not be helpful. Calcium carbonate additionally is a good source of calcium for those who need it. It should not be taken by persons with kidney disease and should be taken at least 2 hours after any other medications.

- **Cimetidine** (solitary active ingredient in some Tagamet products).
  
  Cimetidine belongs to a group of substances called “H-2 blockers” which block one of the stomach’s signals for acid release. These substances are helpful with abdominal pain which is due to stomach acid. They do not work as quickly as antacids, but last longer.

- **Diphenhydramine** (solitary active ingredient in some Benadryl products) (Also solitary active ingredient in some Nytol, Sleepinal, Sominex, and Unisom products which are not marketed as anti-itch agents) (Also one of several active ingredients in many cough, cold and flu products).
  
  Diphenhydramine is an antihistamine. While marketed for its anti-itch properties and as a sleep-inducer, it also has anti-spasmodic properties. Anti-spasmodics slow the waves of contractions which move the intestinal contents through the bowels. If the abdominal pain is due to excessive contractions, as may sometimes accompany gastrointestinal irritation of many causes, diphenhydramine may be helpful. Because it is not marketed for this use, you should discuss this with your child’s physician. If your child has constipation, you should not use diphenhydramine because the constipation could be worsened.

- **Famotidine** (solitary active ingredient in some Pepcid products).
  
  Famotidine belongs to a group of substances called “H-2 blockers” which block one of the stomach’s signals for acid release. These substances are helpful with abdominal pain which is due to stomach acid. They do not work as quickly as antacids, but last longer.
• **Ibuprofen** (solitary active ingredient in some Advil, Motrin, and Nuprin products).

  Ibuprofen is a nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agent. For many types of abdominal pain it will not be effective. However, if the abdominal pain is due to menstrual cramping, mittelschmerz, abdominal migraine, or minor abdominal wall trauma, it may be effective. If the pain is due to gastritis or ulcers, this class of medication may actually worsen the condition.

• **Magnesium Carbonate** (one of several active ingredients in some Gaviscon and Marblen products).

  Magnesium Carbonate is an antacid, and thus will only help with abdominal pain which is due to stomach acid. It has a slower onset than calcium carbonate, but may last longer. It has the same risk of bloating as with calcium carbonate. It should not be taken by persons with kidney disease, and should be taken at least 2 hours after any other medications.

• **Magnesium Hydroxide** (solitary active ingredient in some Phillip’s products; one of several active ingredients in some Di-gel, Maalox, Mylanta, and Rolaids products).

  Magnesium hydroxide is both an antacid and a laxative, thus may help with abdominal pain due to either stomach acid or constipation. While slower onset than calcium carbonate, it will also have a more sustained effect and will not cause bloating. It should not be taken by persons with kidney disease, and should be taken at least 2 hours after any other medications.

• **Nizatidine** (solitary active ingredient in some Axid products).

  Nizatidine belongs to a group of substances called “H-2 blockers” which block one of the stomach’s signals for acid release. These substances are helpful with abdominal pain which is due to stomach acid. They do not work as quickly as antacids, but last longer.

• **Ranitidine** (solitary active ingredient in some Zantac products).

  Ranitidine belongs to a group of substances called “H-2 blockers” which block one of the stomach’s signals for acid release. These substances are helpful with abdominal pain which is due to stomach acid. They do not work as quickly as antacids, but last longer.

• **Simethicone** (solitary active ingredient in some Alka-Seltzer, Gas-X, Maalox, Mylanta, Mylicon, and Phazyme products; one of several active ingredients in some Di-gel, Imodium, Maalox, Mylanta, and Titralac products).

  Simethicone is a mixture of silicone polymers (dimethyl polysiloxanes and silica gel) which acts as an non-absorbed “anti-foam” medication. Within the bowel it decreases the surface tension of small bubbles, causing them to coalesce into larger bubbles. The larger bubbles are easier to release from the body either through burping or flatulence. Various research suggests that this really does happen, however, there is not convincing evidence that this action actually results in the improvement of any abdominal symptoms including abdominal pain.

• **Sodium Bicarbonate** (solitary active ingredient in some Arm & Hammer products, one of several active ingredients in some Alka-Seltzer products).

  Sodium bicarbonate is a very fast acting antacid. However, there may be significant gas release and bloating with these medications. It should not be taken by persons with kidney disease and should be taken at least 2 hours after any other medications.