

# Sore



# Tummies



## Information for Children, Young People and Families

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### What is Recurrent Abdominal Pain?

This is a name we give to a common childhood symptom which has other names too; Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) or abdominal migraine. Rather than being a result of a disease it is due to a sensitivity of the gut to squeezing, stretching and sometimes to emotional stress or excitement.

### How does your tummy work?

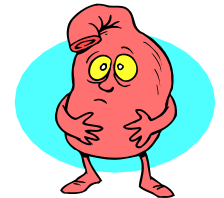
Inside your tummy is a long pipe (also called intestines, bowels or gut). Food goes in through the mouth, moves down the pipe where it is broken down and all the goodness is taken out. Eventually it comes out your bottom as poo (stool or bowel movement).

### What can cause pain in tummy?

Muscles in the pipe wall squeeze the food along. That squeezing movement can sometimes cause pain in your tummy. This pain often comes and goes and can be sharp. The gut also produces gas when it breaks down food. The gas can stretch the pipe wall which some people can feel more than others. This can cause pain and might feel as if you have a balloon in your tummy.

### What can affect how your bowels work?

How your gut works is controlled by the **brain**. Depending on how we feel, the brain sends messages to gut to speed up (sometimes causing diarrhoea, when you poo a lot) or to slow down (sometimes causing constipation, when it's difficult to poo). It works best when we are relaxed. This is why when you feel **stressed**, worried, excited or nervous your tummy pain might get worse. **Diet** also has an effect on how things work.



## Paediatric Psychology and Liaison Service (PPALS)

### What is stress and why does it happen?

Our bodies have developed over thousands of years to keep us safe. In the past, when humans were first around, there were more threats in our daily lives, for example coming



across an angry tiger. These threats gave us the option of fighting or running away. In order to respond to the danger quickly we developed the 'fight or



flight' response. Adrenaline, a chemical in our body, produces lots of effects; our muscles tense, our hearts pound, we breathe faster, and we start to sweat. It also can affect how fast food in our gut moves giving nausea, pain or diarrhoea. Most 'threats' today are much less obvious than angry tigers and include things like tests at school or arguments with parents or friends. Nonetheless, our bodies respond to these things in the same chemical way.

### Relaxation to cope with pain

Learning to cope with stress can really help Recurrent Abdominal Pain. Learning to relax helps reduce adrenaline levels and its unpleasant effects. Relaxing muscles helps to reduce pain and it can help with sleep problems too. Although it sounds very easy, good relaxation needs lots of practice.

**a) 4:4:4 breathing** - Place one hand on your tummy. Breathe in slowly and deeply, and feel your tummy rise. It can help to count to 4 slowly. Hold that breath for a count of 4 then breathe out slowly over another count of 4, and feel your tummy fall. You can do this exercise anytime, without anyone noticing, even in class if you're nervous about something.

**b) A special place visualisation** – Imagine a special place where you feel safe and relaxed. It could be a place you have been to before or the one you just imagined. Use your senses when you imagine you are there: Notice what you can **see** around you and imagine the different shapes and colours. Try to imagine the **sounds** you can hear, for example running water, a sea breeze, or music. Think of the **smells** that you find relaxing, for example hot food, cut grass, or bubble bath. Think of the **tastes** that you like or find calming, like your favourite drink and meal. Imagine how it **feels** to touch parts of the image, like sand, grass, or your favourite toy.



**c) Picture the pain** - Imagine a picture of your pain: does it feel like burning or cramping? Does it feel sharp and prickly? Tight? Now, as you breathe, imagine the picture changing into something more calming. For example if the pain is like a red ball of fire inside your tummy, imagine the flames cooling to a sunset or being put out with water. If it feels tight, imagine a special tool that can unwind the tension.

**Distraction** (thinking about something else) - It's a good technique to cope with things that make us feel worried or upset and can also help to cope with pain. Keep your mind busy and away from the thing that is bothering you (e.g. pain). Do what you like doing best, e.g. play a game, listen to music, talk to friends, watch a movie.

***If you have any further questions, please speak to your Consultant at RHSC for further information.***

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