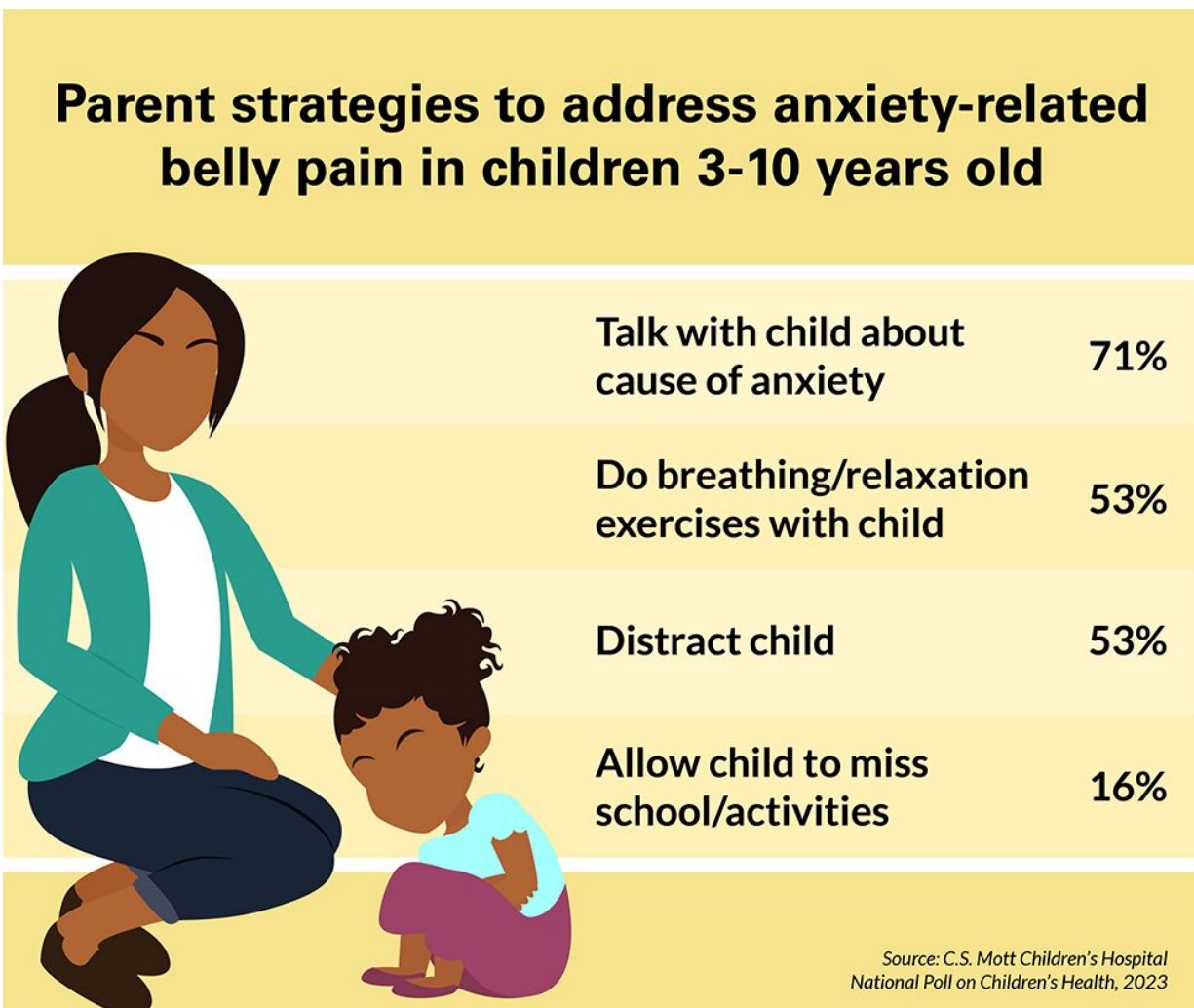


1 in 6 parents say child reports tummy pain at least monthly but many haven't consulted with a doctor

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Parents use different strategies to soothe anxiety-related belly pain. Credit: University of Michigan Health C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on

Children's Health.

Tummy aches are common among kids, with one in six parents in a new national poll saying their child experiences them at least once a month.

But not all parents seek professional advice when belly [pain](#) becomes a regular occurrence and just one in three are sure they'd know when it might be a sign of a serious problem, according to the University of Michigan Health C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health.

"Tummy complaints are common among [children](#). This type of pain may be a symptom for a range of health issues, but it can be difficult to know if it's transient or a cause for concern," said Mott Poll co-director and Mott pediatrician Susan Woolford, M.D.

"Our poll suggests that despite benefits of seeking professional help, parents may not always consult with a doctor when determining whether belly pain is a sign of something serious and how to relieve it."

Among parents reporting monthly belly pain for their [child](#), two in five have not discussed the issue with a doctor, finds the nationally representative report, which is based on 1,081 responses from parents of children aged three to 10.

Some parents report less frequent belly pain, with nearly a third saying their child experiences it a few times a year, and more than half reporting their child rarely or never complains of tummy issues.

Nearly three fourths of parents think their child's belly pain is related to digestion or food, such as gas, indigestion, and constipation while fewer

point to a virus or infection as the cause.

But over a quarter of parents attributed their child's belly pain to worry and anxiety or trying to avoid school or get attention; this belief was more common among parents of children aged 6-10 than [younger children](#) ages three to five (34% vs. 20%).

When parents suspect that worry or anxiety is the cause of belly pain, most address this situation by talking with their child about the cause of their anxiety while others help them with breathing or relaxation exercises or attempt to distract them. Sixteen percent of parents allow their child to miss school or other activities related to their worry.

"This situation warrants parental attention as it may be a signal of important emotional health concerns for the child," Woolford said. "Parents should give children a safe space to express their feelings and concerns and help them identify potential stressors, such as school-related pressures, family issues or social challenges."

Nearly a third of parents are very likely to give an over-the-counter product when their child has belly pain, including probiotics, medicine for an upset stomach, pain relievers or stool softeners.

While some products may ease the child's discomfort, others may be counterproductive, Woolford cautions.

For example, the active ingredient in some upset stomach medications is bismuth which slows down gut motility. While this would be helpful in limiting the course of diarrhea, she says, it may slow the process of recovery from a viral infection and may lead to constipation in children.

"Parents will naturally want help alleviate their child's pain but they should understand the pros and cons of different remedies to make sure

medicine makes it better and not worse," Woolford said.

Parents polled use different measures to gauge the cause of stomach pain, with most having the child describe it while less than half see if the child can continue with regular activities, has a temperature or describes improvement in pain from changing positions. A smaller number probe the belly to see where it hurts.

Most parents said they would be very likely to contact their child's doctor or seek emergency care if their child's belly pain includes blood in the stool (84%) while about 65% would call if the child feels a "sharp" pain like a knife, if the pain continues for more the six hours (64%) or if the belly is swollen (63%) or hard (49%).

"In some cases, abdominal pain is an important sign of more serious problems such as appendicitis, bowel obstructions, [urinary tract infections](#) and for boys, testicular problems such as hernias," Woolford said. "Many parents polled weren't confident they could recognize these situations. If a child is experiencing severe, frequent or disruptive pain, it's always best to err on the side of caution and call the doctor."

Provided by University of Michigan

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