# Study reveals effective therapies for children's abdominal pain



A recent study has revealed that talking therapies, specifically cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and hypnotherapy are the most effective treatments for long-term unexplained abdominal pain in children. This study, the largest of its kind, highlights the prevalence of such conditions, affecting up to 12% of children globally, which equates to approximately 300 million children who experience chronic, debilitating pain.

Conducted by a research team led by experts at the University of Central Lancashire, the study scrutinised 91 research papers involving over 7,200 children aged between four and 18. The analysis included various treatment methods such as dietary interventions, medications, probiotics, and psychosocial treatments including CBT and hypnotherapy. The findings indicated moderate efficacy for both hypnotherapy and CBT, with hypnotherapy being 68% more successful and CBT 35% more successful compared to no treatment at all. However, the study authors noted that there was insufficient evidence to evaluate the success of other therapies.

Professor Morris Gordon, from the University of Central Lancashire’s School of Medicine and lead author of the study, discussed the implications of this research. In an interview with the PA news agency, he highlighted that nearly 5% of all paediatric outpatient hospital appointments in the UK are related to unexplained abdominal pain. He emphasised the significant burden this condition places on the NHS and stressed its impact on the children and their families. “They can’t go to school, they can’t function,” he explained, sharing stories of young patients whose hobbies and aspirations were disrupted by their condition.

The study prompted the creation of new guidelines for the treatment of abdominal pain in children, addressing a current gap in evidence-based protocols for medical practitioners. Professor Gordon remarked on the inconsistency in treatment approaches among general practitioners, where some may prescribe probiotics while others opt for pain medication or dietary changes. He noted, “This analysis provides, for the first time, an accurate way of grading the success rate of treatments.”

Professor Gordon further acknowledged societal biases against psychosocial therapies, stating that there is often an expectation for medicalised treatments. “All that matters is the right outcome for the child and the family,” he pointed out, adding that while the condition does not have identifiable psychological causes, effective management can enhance the quality of life for affected children.

Moreover, Professor Gordon raised concerns over the accessibility of hypnotherapy and CBT for treating abdominal pain. He called for increased efforts to ensure these therapies are more widely available, noting their established safety and tolerability.

Professor Marc Benninga, a paediatric gastroenterologist from Emma Children's Hospital in Amsterdam and collaborator on the study, underscored the need for further clinical trials to assess the efficacy of alternative treatments for abdominal pain in children. “This study highlights the low quality of the scientific research that has been performed to date in a very common condition as abdominal pain,” he stated.

In summary, the findings of this extensive research contribute to a better understanding of effective management strategies for chronic abdominal pain in children, illuminating the necessity for more structured approaches and availability of psychosocial therapies within paediatric healthcare settings.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9002716/> - This study supports the effectiveness of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and hypnotherapy for managing functional abdominal pain disorders in children, highlighting their moderate efficacy compared to no intervention.
* <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28072460/> - This review provides evidence for the beneficial effects of CBT and hypnotherapy in reducing pain in children with recurrent abdominal pain, emphasizing their short-term benefits.
* <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapediatrics/fullarticle/2613403> - This study confirms the value of hypnotherapy in treating children with functional abdominal pain or irritable bowel syndrome, showing its effectiveness both in home-based settings and when performed by therapists.
* <https://community.the-hospitalist.org/content/cbt-or-hypnotherapy-may-help-kids-functional-abdominal-pain> - This article supports the consideration of CBT and hypnotherapy as viable treatments for functional abdominal pain in children, noting their potential benefits despite limitations in evidence quality.
* <https://www.gastroenterologyadvisor.com/news/psychosocial-therapies-may-effectively-treat-pediatric-functional-abdominal-pain-disorders/> - This article highlights the role of psychosocial therapies, particularly CBT and hypnotherapy, in treating pediatric functional abdominal pain disorders, emphasizing their potential as recommended treatments.