

Chronic Functional Abdominal Pain

Chronic functional abdominal pain (CFAP) is chronic or frequent pain in the abdomen (belly) for which there is no known cause. No infection or disease can be found.

What causes CFAP?

We believe that CFAP is a disorder of the nervous system. Your nerve impulses are increased, or “too loud,” and result in pain.

Certain parts of the brain sense abdominal pain. One part is focused on the amount of pain and where it is located. The other part is focused on memories and feelings. Our nerves and the way we sense pain can be affected by feelings and stress.

While symptoms of CFAP can come on without a cause, they can also happen after a stressful event. During times of added stress, symptoms can get worse.

Injury, such as surgery, can also cause nerves in the abdomen to become very sensitive. Even normal abdominal activity may be painful. This is sometimes called **hypersensitivity**.

Can CFAP be treated?

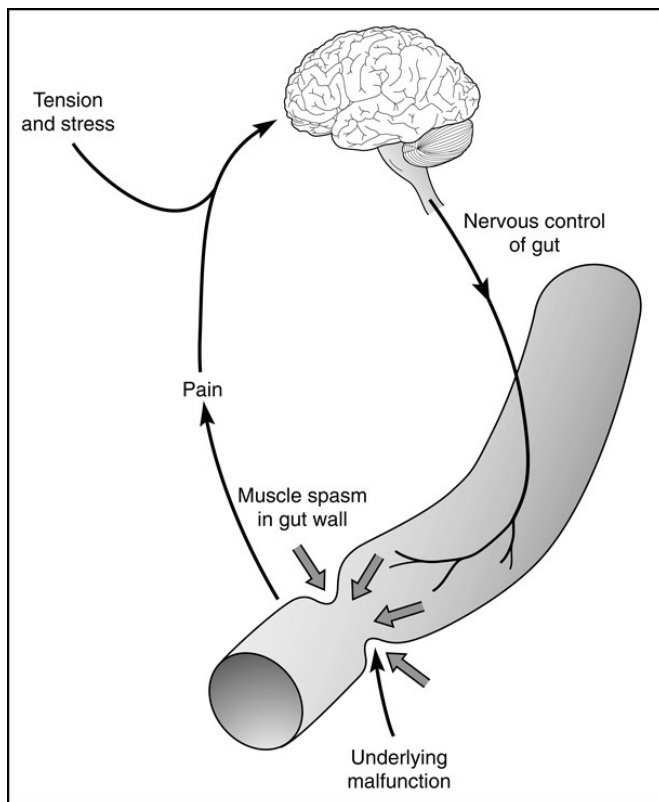
The goal for treating CFAP is to help you gain control over and improve your symptoms. Sometimes medicine is prescribed to help with pain. The best treatment is the use of other techniques to relax and distract yourself from the pain.

How does the treatment work?

The brain affects how you feel pain and can also block pain. When nerve impulses travel up from the abdomen they go through a “gate” that is controlled by nerve impulses coming down from the brain. These impulses can block pain signals by closing the gate. There are techniques you can use to close the gate to pain signals.

How can I retrain my brain to decrease my feelings of pain?

There is no proven way to do this, but there are some things you may want to try. The first step is to learn how and when your symptoms start. Use a journal to keep track of your bowel movements, pain symptoms, and feelings during the day. This can help you find patterns and triggers. Bring your journal to clinic when you see your doctor.



What can I do to relax?

It helps to have a few different ways to relax. You can:

- Exercise
- Read
- Watch TV
- Practice mind body techniques like yoga, meditation and tai chi
- Talk about your feelings
 - Talk to family or friends
 - Join a support group
- Write your feelings down in a journal—set aside time each day to write

What medicines are used to treat CFAP?

Medicines may be used to treat the pain or other problems like constipation, diarrhea, or anxiety. For constant or severe pain, your doctor may order medicines that block nerve messages of pain. This may include an anti-depression medicine, muscle relaxants, or anti-seizure medicine. It may take a few weeks to notice a change.

Opioid medicines (narcotics) **rarely** help with CFAP and can be harmful. Over time, opioids can worsen symptoms of CFAP.

Are there any side effects to taking medicines?

Each medicine is different and can cause side effects. Take time to learn what the side effects are and when to report them to your doctor. Often, the side effects will go away after a few days. Try to keep taking the medicine(s) until you feel it is working.

Do I need follow-up care?

It helps to see a doctor who is familiar with CFAP. Treatment works best when you and your doctor act as a team. Your doctor will teach you about CFAP and your treatment options.

If you are a patient receiving care at UnityPoint – Meriter, Swedish American or a health system outside of UW Health, please use the phone numbers provided in your discharge instructions for any questions or concerns.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 1/2022 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#6694