

# Swallowed (Ingested) foreign bodies



**Paediatrics A & E Department**

This leaflet is designed to give you advice when you suspect your child has swallowed a foreign body/object.

- Children commonly swallow things such as coins, small toys, or batteries.
- When a child swallows an object, it will travel through the digestive tract.
- The digestive tract is made up of the oesophagus (the tube from the mouth to the stomach), stomach and small and large intestines.
- Most swallowed objects travel through the digestive tract and leave the body without causing problems.
- Some objects can cause problems and need to be removed from the digestive tract by a doctor.
- Objects in the oesophagus may not pass into the stomach and can cause problems. These sometimes need to be removed by a doctor.
- If the object is in the stomach or further along, most children will pass the object on their own. This is because the smallest part is the sphincter at the top of the stomach.

**If your child has swallowed a button battery (from a watch or calculator) or magnets you should seek urgent medical care.**

## **What are the signs and symptoms?**

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Many children have no symptoms after swallowing an object.

If children do have symptoms, they may have:

- Trouble swallowing food
- Drooling
- Pain in the chest or neck
- Coughing, trouble breathing, or noisy breathing

These symptoms usually happen when the object is stuck in the oesophagus.

## **You should seek urgent medical care if:**

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- If your child is coughing or has difficulty breathing, the object may be in their airway or lungs. These objects need to be removed and you should seek urgent medical care- Dial 999.
- Very rarely, the object can become stuck in the stomach or intestines. If this happens your child may have ongoing vomiting, abdominal (tummy) pain, blood in their vomit or poo, or develop a fever.

## **What treatment should I expect?**

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The doctor or nurse will ask what your child has swallowed. If your child fits the criteria for using a hand held metal detector they will be scanned when assessed by the nurse. This aims to determine the position of the foreign body.

## **Will my child need an x-ray?**

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An x-ray will only be done if the swallowed object is made of material that shows up on an x-ray and the hand held metal detector detects metal above the Xiphisternum (the point at the bottom of your child's stomach), or if your child has worrying symptoms.

## **Will swallowed objects need to be removed?**

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This depends on what the object is and where it is in the digestive tract

Some objects can harm the body and may need to be removed urgently. These include batteries (button and disc batteries) and magnets.

Objects in the oesophagus often need to be removed. This will depend on your child's symptoms.

Most objects in the stomach or further along (in the intestines) will pass safely on their own

If your child has worrying symptoms after swallowing an object, it may need to be removed. You should seek medical advice if you are concerned about any symptoms

## **If the object doesn't need to be removed:**

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If we are unable to detect the object with the metal detector or see the object on an x-ray and your child has no worrying symptoms, it is ok to observe your child at home for any further symptoms.

Even sharp objects like broken glass and pins will most likely pass once they are in the stomach or further along.

## **Things to look for at home:**

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- Abdominal (tummy) pain.
- Ongoing vomiting.
- Blood in your child's vomit.
- Blood in your child's faeces (poo).
- Fever.

## **Will there be a follow-up appointment?**

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Most children do not need any follow up or x-rays.

There is no need to examine your child's faeces to find the swallowed object.

## **Key points to remember:**

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Most children will pass the object on their own once it is in their stomach or further along.

After you leave the doctor or emergency department, observe your child at home for the symptoms listed above.

If you are concerned about your child, please seek medical advice.



## Contact details

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Paediatric Emergency Department  
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## PALS and Advocacy contact details

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Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

**Telephone:** 01483 402757

**Email:** [rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net)

**Opening hours:** 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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