



Oxford University Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Swallowed (Ingested) Foreign Objects in Children

Advice for parents and carers



Swallowed foreign objects in children

Children often explore objects by putting them in their mouths. Most swallowed foreign objects are harmless and will pass through the body's digestive system without causing any problems. Sometimes objects get stuck in the food pipe (oesophagus) before entering the stomach, but once passed in to the stomach are very unlikely to cause any harm. The object may not even be noticed when it is passed in the stool (poo).

Does my child need an X-ray?

Not all swallowed foreign objects are visible on X-rays, and therefore an X-ray will not always be required, your doctor or nurse will advise you after assessment of your child.

When metal foreign objects are swallowed, these can sometimes be located using a hand-held metal detector wand. Use of a metal detector on a child is a harmless, non-painful way of locating small metal objects such as coins. The doctor or nurse seeing your child will make the decision to use a metal detector based on what your child has swallowed. If the metal detector identifies the metal object in or below the stomach, they may not need an X-ray.

After discharge

Most swallowed foreign objects will be left to pass through the child's digestive system naturally. You do not need to check your child's poo as the objects may take a few weeks to pass through.

When to return to hospital

Once discharged home, you should return to hospital with your child if they develop any of the following problems:

- Difficulty breathing
- Difficulty swallowing
- Pain in their chest or neck
- Vomiting
- Blood in vomit
- Tummy (abdominal) pain
- Blood in poo

Safety in the home

Button batteries (round flat batteries commonly found in watches and hearing aids), and magnets can be particularly dangerous if swallowed. They should always be kept out of reach of children and if there is any possibility that your child has swallowed a battery or magnet, or placed one in their ear or nose, please attend your nearest Emergency Department immediately.

If you have any other concerns or require further advice, please telephone NHS 111.

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Authors: Claire Osborne and Jessica Carmichael
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www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



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charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

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