

Swallowed Harmless Substance

Definition

- Your child swallowed an unusual but harmless substance
- Your doctor told you it was harmless
- It was not a solid object that could get caught in the throat or esophagus
- It was not a poison, chemical or drug

Health Information

Types of Harmless Substances

- **Spoiled food.** Small risk of vomiting or diarrhea.
- **Raw or undercooked meat or eggs.** Small risk of vomiting or diarrhea.
- **Pet food.** Safe if fresh. Usually safe even if some of it has been eaten by the pet.
- **Reptile food** (such as mealworms or other small insects). Usually safe.
- **Dead insects, spiders or worms** found outside. Usually safe.
- **Dirty water from toilet, fish tank, pond, stream.** Small risk of vomiting and/or diarrhea.
- **Dirt or sand.** Small risk of swallowed germs from animal feces (poop).
- **Human feces (poop).** Usually, this is safe unless stool is diarrhea
- **Animal feces (poop).** Small risk of vomiting and/or diarrhea. Rare risk of worms.
- **Cat litter.** Harmless. It's sterilized earth or clay. Usually safe even if in a used cat box.

Types of Harmless Products

- **Soaps.** Hand soaps (liquid or bar), shampoo
- **Skin products.** Corn starch baby powder is harmless. Talcum powder can be harmful if inhaled, but not eaten. Hand lotions (creams or ointments), petroleum jelly and shaving cream are also safe. Creams and ointments that have OTC medicines in them are safe. OTC means you can buy them without a prescription. Examples are antibiotic, steroid, anti-fungal, anti-yeast, and diaper rash creams and ointments. A small taste of sunscreen is also safe. See next section.
- **Make-up** such as lipstick, blush, mascara. Deodorants and hair sprays are often also harmless, unless they have alcohol in them. Perfumes always have alcohol in them and can be harmful. See next section.
- **Mouth products** such as breath mints, chewing gum, small amount of toothpaste. Mouth washes may have alcohol in them and can be harmful. See below.
- **Writing products.** Includes chalk, crayons, paper, pen and marker ink. Lead pencils (which are really graphite) are also safe.
- **Paints/Glue.** These types of glue (white, arts and crafts) are safe. Water color paints and water-based paints are also safe.
- **Pets.** Dog or cat food, cat litter (earth or clay) are safe.
- **Other harmless items.** Candles, cooking lard or grease, dirt, glow products (glow sticks), play dough, yard grass. Mercury in glass thermometers is safe if swallowed, but harmful if inhaled. Silica granules (in desiccant packets) are also safe.

Harmless Products, but Only if Swallowed in Small Amounts

The items listed below when eaten are usually safe and not a problem. But, there are exceptions. If a larger amount is swallowed, call the Poison Center.

- **Deodorants.** Exception: liquid type deodorant and more than a taste. Reason: may have alcohol in it.
- **Hairspray.** Exception: more than a taste. Reason: often has alcohol in it.
- **Hand sanitizer.** Exception: more than a taste. Reason: has 60% alcohol in it.
- **Hydrogen peroxide 3%.** Exception: more than 3%. Industrial strength solutions use 10 to 30%.

- **Mouth washes.** Exception: more than a taste. Reason: may have alcohol in it.
- **Paper matches.** Exception: 10 or more are eaten.
- **Perfumes.** Exception: more than a taste. Reason: perfumes have more than 90% alcohol.
- **Sunscreens.** Exception: eats more than 1 ounce (2 Tablespoons or 30 ml). Reason: Some sunscreens have aspirin-like products in them.
- **Toothpaste.** Exception: large amount such as more than a mouthful (2 ounces)

Care Advice

1. **Spoiled Food - Overview:**
 - Eating a spoiled food or drink shouldn't cause any problems. Your child should do fine.
 - Your child may vomit once, just from the taste.
 - A few children may vomit or have loose stools within the next 5 days.
 - The illness is often mild and goes away on its own.
2. **Undercooked Food - Overview:**
 - Eating undercooked/raw meat or eggs shouldn't cause any symptoms. Your child should do fine.
 - A few children may vomit or have loose stools within the next 5 days.
 - The illness is often mild and goes away on its own.
3. **Swallowed Human Feces (Poop) - Overview:**
 - Eating your own feces is always harmless. All of these germs are already in the child's body and digestive tract. Some young children in diapers may do this at some point. This will not cause illness. Only the parent is bothered by it.
 - Eating another human's feces is probably harmless if that person is healthy now. If the other person has diarrhea, your child may also develop it.
4. **Swallowed Animal Feces (Poop) - Overview:**
 - Eating feces from an animal is usually harmless.
 - Many swallowed germs are destroyed by the acid in the stomach.
 - Your child may vomit once, just from the taste.
 - There's a small risk of getting diarrhea.
 - There's a very small risk of getting worms.
 - For racoon feces, do check with your doctor
 - Write down the date your child ate the feces and the type of animal.
 - If your child has any symptoms, this information may help your doctor. They can decide which tests would be helpful.
5. **Swallowed Dirt - Overview:**
 - Dirt, sand or water outside can be dirty with animal feces (poop).
 - Most all people swallow some dirt.
 - Most children will do fine.
 - There's a very small risk of getting diarrhea.
6. **Dirty City Water - Overview:**
 - If the public water supply becomes dirty with germs, boil it.
 - Bring the water to a boil. Then keep it boiling for 3 minutes. Reason: Should kill all the germs.
 - Could also drink bottled water until the problem is fixed.

7. Treatment is Not Needed:

- No treatment is needed or helpful.
- Antibiotics are not helpful.
- No tests or cultures are needed.
- Feed your child a normal diet.

8. Questions about Other Substances - Call Poison Center 1-800-222-1222:

- This is the phone number for every poison center in the United States.
- It connects you automatically with the local poison center.
- Poison Center advice is a free service.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child vomits or has diarrhea in the next 3 weeks
- Your child swallows a solid, nonfood object, such as button batteries or magnets
- You think your child needs to be seen
- You have other questions or concerns

Pediatric Care Advice

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