

Swallowed Small Object

Definition

- Small harmless solid object swallowed
- Child has no symptoms

Health Information

Types of Solid Objects (Foreign Bodies) Swallowed by Children

- **Coins.** The most common swallowed non-food, solid object. Over 5% of children swallow a coin. Over half are pennies. Dimes and pennies are most often safe. Coin diameters are 18 mm (dime), 19 mm (penny), 21 mm (nickel) and 24 mm (quarter). Source: U.S. Mint.
- **Small blunt (non-sharp) objects.** These include toy parts, game parts, rings, some earrings, paper clips, or a tooth. Most often safe if not sharp.
- **Button batteries (serious).** Needs urgent removal.
- **Magnets (serious).** Needs urgent removal.
- **Sharp or Pointed FBs (serious).** Includes needles, pins, pushpins, tacks, nails, screws, some earrings, pine needles, fish bones, toothpicks, bottle caps, aluminum pull tabs. Most need urgent removal. Tiny pieces of glass generally pass without any symptoms.

Care Advice

1. **Overview:**
 - Your child swallowed a small, harmless object.
 - Since your child has no symptoms, it should be in the stomach.
 - In general, anything that can get to the stomach will pass through the intestines.
 - Just to be sure it's not in the esophagus, do a swallow test.
2. **Swallow Test - Check Your Child's Ability to Swallow Food:**
 - Give some water to drink.
 - If swallowed easily, give some bread to eat. Reason: If bread becomes hung up, enzymes normally found in saliva can dissolve it.
 - If can swallow bread and water, all is well. Return to a normal diet.
3. **Check All Stools for the Object:**
 - For very small smooth objects, checking the stools is not needed.
 - For objects that are dime-size or larger OR not smooth, check the stools. Also, check the stools if you are concerned for any reason.
 - Have your younger child wear a diaper to catch the stool.
 - If bowel trained, put something in the toilet to catch the stool. Or pass stools on newspapers.
 - Slice stool with a knife until the object is found.
4. **What to Expect:**
 - Swallowed objects almost always make it to the stomach. They travel through the intestines and are passed in a normal stool in 2 or 3 days.
 - There is nothing you can do to hurry this process.

5. **Prevention:**

- You were lucky this time. It was a safe object.
- But this could happen again. Reason: Your child is at an age where they explore things by putting them in their mouth.
- Be sure to keep small objects off the floor and out of reach.
- Sometimes an object just turns up in a stool. Many young children swallow things when no one is around. Be extra careful with button batteries. They can be deadly.

Call Your Doctor If

- Your child can't swallow water and bread
- Gagging occurs or doesn't want to eat
- Stomach pain or vomiting occurs
- Coughing occurs
- Object hasn't passed within 3 days
- You think your child needs to be seen
- Your child becomes worse

Pediatric Care Advice

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