

**We recommend that all parents / carers
attend a local paediatric first aid course**



A guide to...

Swallowed Foreign Bodies and Choking *Patient Information*

If you need this leaflet in another language, large
print, Braille or audio version, please call
01923 217 187 or email **westherts.pals@nhs.uk**



Author	Sian Edwards
Department	Children's Emergency Department
Ratified / Review Date	January 2025 / January 2028
ID Number	40/2365/V1



Children's Emergency Department (CED)
Watford General Hospital



Swallowed Foreign Bodies

Swallowed objects are a very common reason for children to attend the emergency department, particularly for children aged between six months and four years.

How do we know where the object is?

Most of the time, swallowed metal objects eg, coins or toy parts, can be reliably diagnosed with a hand-held metal detector. This can reassure us that they are going in the right direction. The clinician will have checked this for you if necessary.

Objects made of anything other than metal eg, stone, plastic or glass, cannot be detected. As long as your child has not choked on the item and are not having any unusual symptoms, such as coughing, drooling, vomiting then we can be reassured that it will pass naturally without any problems and don't need to do anything further. It can take up to two weeks to pass through the GI tract.

If there is any chance that your child could have swallowed magnets or button batteries, they must be seen urgently. Only in these instances will an X-ray be routinely ordered.

Do I need to return?

There is no need to have your child routinely checked up.

However, you should return if you have concerns that your child is unwell or they develop any of the following:

- Severe tummy pain
- Bloated and hard tummy, will often be painful to touch
- Persistent vomiting, especially if green
- Bleeding from their bottom

Do I need to check my child's poo?

No - there is absolutely no need to do this. The object will pass and it is unlikely that you will ever find it. This will undoubtedly cause you more worry that is not necessary.

Safety Advice and Choking

It is normal for young children to explore and put objects into their mouths, however some objects are just the right size to get stuck in the child's airway and cause choking.

Safety Advice

- Ensure your child has age appropriate toys, taking special care with those containing magnets or button batteries. If you have older children then please ensure their toys are kept out of reach.
- Keep small objects out of reach of children, especially those that have begun crawling.
- Observe children when they eat, especially during weaning. NEVER leave your child to eat without direct supervision.
- Cut food such as grapes, cherry tomatoes, and hotdogs into smaller pieces — small items of food, firm and round in shape, can get stuck in the airway and block the airflow completely.

What if my child is choking?

- Encourage them to cough, depending on their age / size, assist them to lean forwards.
- You can give firm backslaps (see additional resource) to help dislodge the object.
- If you can see the object and it is near the front of the mouth, then you can try to remove it. DO NOT poke blindly or repeatedly with your fingers, you could push the object further back and make it harder to remove.
- If your child's coughing is silent or they cannot breathe properly, call loudly for help immediately and call 999.

Additional Resources

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/baby/first-aid-and-safety/first-aid/how-to-stop-a-child-from-choking/>