



A guide to...

Swallowed Foreign Bodies and Choking *Patient Information*

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.

Post choking Advice

Persistent cough

A cough that doesn't go away after the choking incident could indicate that the blockage is still present or that there is inflammation or irritation in the airways.

Difficulty swallowing or speaking

These symptoms could suggest that the airway or esophagus is still irritated or that the muscles involved in swallowing or speech are affected.

Shortness of breath and wheezing

These symptoms can be a sign of inflammation or swelling in the airways, which can make breathing difficult.

Fever

A fever after a choking episode, especially if it develops within a short period, could indicate an infection.

Other symptoms

Other possible symptoms include vomiting, drooling, gagging, chest or throat pain, and abdominal pain.

When to seek immediate help

If any of the symptoms mentioned above, particularly difficulty breathing or a persistent cough, become severe or do not improve, seek immediate medical attention.

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.

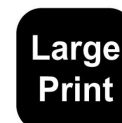
If your child's coughing is silent or they cannot breathe properly, call loudly for help immediately and call 999.

Additional Resources

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

Hospital switchboard: 01923 244366

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**



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