

Ingestion (swallowing) of foreign bodies in children

This leaflet offers information about the ingestion (swallowing) of foreign bodies in children. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the staff member in charge of your child's care.

What is an ingested foreign body?

Foreign body refers to any object in the body that is not supposed to be there. Children often use their mouths to explore new objects, leading to a greater chance of accidentally swallowing a foreign body. Swallowing of foreign bodies is common amongst children, especially younger children between the age of six months and three years old. Most objects pass through the digestive system without causing harm, however there are some objects that are dangerous may require further investigation and management.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Children who have ingested a foreign body may present with

- Difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)
- Sore throat
- Drooling
- Gagging
- Vomiting
- Noisy breathing (stridor)
- Cough
- Pain in their neck, throat or chest.

Many children who present following ingestion of a foreign body are asymptomatic (do not show symptoms) and the event was witnessed by a parent or carer.

Do I need any tests to confirm the diagnosis?

Some objects such as metal and bones can be seen using an X-ray. However, some objects like plastic, paper and wood may not show up on X-ray.

What treatments are available?

Most foreign bodies are harmless and pass through the digestive system uneventfully. In some cases where a child has swallowed a dangerous object like a battery, sharp or magnet, they will require further investigation and management.

Please see the “Swallowing of super strong magnets in Children” leaflet for further information.

What is the plan today?

Your child has been assessed as safe to go home after swallowing a foreign body.

Even though the object has not passed through them yet, it is fine to take your child home. Most children will pass the object without needing any extra help.

There is no need to examine your child’s faeces (poo) to find the object.

We do not need to follow up on your child.

When to return to the Emergency Department

Very rarely foreign bodies can get stuck in the stomach or bowels.

Please return to the Emergency Department immediately if your child is experiencing

- Abdominal (tummy) pain
- High temperature more than 38 degrees
- Vomiting
- Blood in their vomit or poo
- You have concerns of further foreign body ingestion
- Change in your child's eating patterns e.g., refusing fluids or food.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



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