

Foreign Object in the Ear

What is it?

Anything in the ear canal that normally would not be there.

If left untreated, a foreign object in the ear can cause pain, infection and hearing loss.

Plan of Action:

- **Know when to seek help.** If there is bleeding, severe pain, drainage or signs of infection, see a health care provider right away. Also, if you know the object is a battery, seek help right away. And if you can't easily see the object and you've tried removing it more than once, stop and get care. Delays and many failed tries to remove it can lead to infection and damage.
- **Never poke or prod the object.** If you use tools such as cotton swabs or matchsticks to pry an object out, they can push it deeper into the ear. This may cause more damage.
- **Use tweezers.** If the object is easy to see and grasp, gently remove it with tweezers.
- **Use water.** Only wash out the ear canal if you don't think there is a hole in the eardrum. Use a rubber-bulb syringe and warm water to wash the object out of the canal. Don't use water to remove batteries, food, or plant material.

- **Use oil or alcohol for an insect.** If the object is an insect, tilt the head so that the ear with the insect is upward. Pour alcohol or warm, but not hot, oil into the ear. The oil can be mineral oil, olive oil, or baby oil. The insect should float out. Don't use oil if you think there is a hole in the eardrum.
- **Never use liquid if there is a hole in the eardrum.** If you see signs of a hole in the eardrum such as pain, bleeding or discharge, see a health care provider right away.

Remember, if you can't remove the object easily the first time, get help. Also, if the person continues to have pain, discharge from the ear canal, problems hearing, or feeling there is something lodged in the ear, see a health care provider.

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