



Food safety advice

Foreign Bodies in Food

There are a number of common complaints about foreign bodies (objects) found in food. A number of the items found are either normal parts of the food or harmless contamination. This advice sheet has been written to help you identify and deal with some of these common 'foreign bodies'. Most can be dealt with by returning the item to the retailer. Others however have food safety implications and need to be dealt with by the Food Safety Team. The **Action** point will guide you as to the best way of dealing with your 'foreign object'.

It can be an unpleasant experience to find an object in food or a condition of food that you wouldn't normally expect. However, we are not able to investigate all food complaints.

If you have purchased food which appears to have been chewed by mice/rats or where you can see mice/rat droppings or other evidence of pests (e.g. cockroaches) then report this to us as a food complaint.

As long as the manufacturer can show that all reasonable precautions were taken to try to stop certain food complaints from happening, it is accepted that a number of these will occur. This is called the due diligence defence.

Please note:

We are unable to obtain compensation for any complaint about food. If you wish to seek compensation please contact the manufacturer or retailer or seek your own legal advice.

Tinned Food

Struvite

Certain naturally occurring elements in fish may develop into hard crystals during the canning process. These crystals may be mistaken for glass fragments and are called STRUVITE. It is not harmful and will be broken down by stomach acids if swallowed.

It is especially common in tinned salmon. Struvite crystals will be dissolved if placed in vinegar and gently heated. Glass will not dissolve.



Action

Heat the crystal gently in vinegar, if the foreign body does not dissolve contact the Food Safety Team.

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Mould

Dented, Damaged or incorrectly processed tins may allow mould growth to occur. This could indicate an error in production or storage.

Action

DO NOT EAT ANY FOODS FROM DAMAGED TINS

Return the food to the retailer or manufacturer.



Mould in spaghetti hoops

Hide

Canned meat products containing beef – such as corned beef, or canned stew, can contain small pieces of cow hide – this has the appearance of being a black object with hair on it. Whilst unsightly, it is not harmful.

Action

Return to the store where it was purchased or send the hide with the serial number from the can to the manufacturer. They will find the information helpful to improve quality control.

Insects

Occasionally, small grubs may be discovered in canned vegetables especially sweetcorn and tomatoes. The grubs are the larvae of a moth which live inside the sweetcorn kernel or tomato and are impossible to see before they are processed. Although it isn't pleasant to find a grub in your food, they are killed and sterilised by the canning process. As the use of pesticides decreases, these types of problem will increase.

Action

There is no public health risk, you should contact the manufacturer or supermarket.

Wasps and Fruit Flies

These are naturally associated with fruit and so often found in tins of fruit and they do not carry disease.

Action

There is no public health risk, you should contact the manufacturer or supermarket.



Food safety advice

Fish

Codworm

White fish such as Cod or Haddock may contain a small round, brownish looking worm. These are found in the flesh of the fish. They are killed during cooking and are harmless to humans. The affected parts of the fish are usually cut away but some may be overlooked.

Action

Return the food to the retailer or manufacturer.

Meat, Poultry and Fresh Eggs

Skin/Bones/Feathers/Shell

Products made from fresh eggs, meat and/or poultry may contain small pieces of egg shell, bone, skin, feathers, hide or parts of blood vessels. These are unsightly but rarely a health hazard as they are normal parts of the original animal. Any personal inconvenience, e.g. a chipped tooth is best dealt with privately via civil action if necessary.



Action

Return the food to the retailer or manufacturer

Fresh Fruit & Vegetables



Stones, Soil and Insects

Fruit and Vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small insects such as slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate in the soil and grow outdoors. Farmers are limited on how much pesticide they can use so can not remove all pests.

Action

Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly before use.

Plant Insects

Salad vegetables, especially lettuce, can have greenfly or similar insects attached. This is becoming increasingly common as the use of pesticides decreases. Greenfly can be difficult to wash off but are not harmful.



Action

Wash fruit/vegetables thoroughly before use.



Food safety advice

Bruised or Mouldy fruit/vegetables

Mould will naturally occur when fruit and vegetables become bruised and damaged which can happen during transportation and/or whilst on display. If not stored in a cool place, some fruits can go mouldy very quickly.

Action

Check produce carefully before purchase and handle and store carefully afterwards. If you have purchased mouldy food from a shop return it to the store.

Mushroom Fibre

Fibres can often be mistaken for hairs in meals that contain mushrooms, such as mushroom in pizza or lasagne. The most likely source for these fibres are the compost in which the mushrooms are grown and when harvesting occurs, some of the fibres can stay attached to the mushrooms.

Action

Contact retailer/manufacturere

Green Potatoes

Avoid eating green potatoes, as they may be poisonous. Potatoes naturally turn green if stored incorrectly, particularly if stored somewhere exposed to sunlight.

Action

Avoid selecting green potatoes at purchase and store potatoes in a cool, dark, dry place.

Frozen Vegetables and Fruit

Stones, Soil and Insects

As with the problems associated with fresh vegetables and fruit, foreign objects can sometimes get through the production process, especially if they are a similar size/weight/shape as the vegetables or fruit.

Action

Contact retailer/manufacturere if you find these items in frozen fruit/veg.



Food safety advice

Bakery Goods

Bakery Char

Bread and cakes may contain over-cooked dough, which has flaked off bakery tins. It is not necessarily an indicator of poor hygiene, although they may be mistaken for rodent droppings. Droppings are black and a regular torpedo shape, while bakery char is black and comes in uneven shapes.



Action

Contact Retailer

Carbonised Grease

The machinery used to produce bread and cakes is lubricated with a non-toxic vegetable oil. Occasionally some grease may become incorporated into the dough giving areas of the product a grey/greasy appearance.

Action

Contact retailer/manufacture

Dried Foods

Insects

Dried products such as flour, sugar and pulses may contain small insects such as psocids (book-lice). These do not carry disease but eat through paper packets. They breed very quickly in warm, dark, humid conditions, and so spread into food very quickly.

Action

Throw away all affected food. Clean cupboards with bleach solution and dry thoroughly. Store new dried goods in airtight containers. Ensure good ventilation in kitchen.



Food safety advice

Chocolate and Confectionery

Chocolate bloom

Chocolate may develop a light coloured bloom if stored at too high a temperature. This looks like a creamy powdery coating. It is not mould but due to cocoa fat separation in the chocolate. It is not harmful.

Action

Return to retailer

Crystals

Large sugar crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. These are generally made from sugar. The crystal will dissolve in warm water and is not harmful.



Action

Test with warm water. If it does not dissolve, notify the Food Safety Team.

Suspected glass

Sugar or salt crystals can be mistaken for glass, as can struvite (see above).

Action

- 1) Put the foreign object in a cup of boiling water that's mixed with salt. Stir the solution. If the foreign object does not dissolve, move to step 2
- 2) Put the foreign object in a cup of boiling water which has either vinegar or lemon juice in. Stir the solution. If the foreign object does not dissolve, move to step 3
- 3) Place the foreign object between two spoons and gently squeeze the two spoons together.

If the item does not dissolve/break then notify the Food Safety Team.