

Foreign body in the ear

Sometimes, small objects or insects can enter the ear, referred to as foreign bodies in the ear. The usual types of foreign bodies vary by age: in children, they are often the result of accidentally inserting toy parts, button batteries, seeds, etc. In adults, common foreign bodies include cotton remnants from ear cleaning, parts of hearing aids or insects.

What discomfort do they cause?

Having a foreign body in the ear is distressing. Less commonly, it may cause a sensation of blockage or mild hearing loss. It is very rare for it to cause pain or minimal bleeding. If an insect has entered, the patient may experience a loud drumming noise (due to its movements on the eardrum) and may sometimes be bitten by the insect.

What should you do?

First of all, stay calm, as it is a situation that can be resolved without complications.

Avoid attempting to remove the foreign body or manipulate the ear in any way. Doing so without the proper tools or knowledge can only push the object further inside.

Go to the nearest health center and explain what foreign object has been inserted, if known, and report any previous ear injuries you may have had.

How is it resolved?

Depending on the type of foreign object inserted and the patient's history, it can be removed with tweezers, a curette, or through irrigation. The removal is typically painless and resolves the situation. It is very rare to have to refer the patient to an ear specialist as an emergency.

How to prevent it?

Most cases are accidental and cannot be prevented. Avoid inserting cotton swabs or other objects into the ears. Also, refrain from using swabs for ear cleaning due to the risk of becoming foreign objects, and because they can injure the eardrum and impact hearing. Similarly, be very careful when using hearing aids.

