



Swallowed a quarter

Question

<p>Dear Alice,</p>

<p>I accidentally swallowed a quarter. What should I do?</p>

Answer

<p>Dear Reader,</p>



<p>Although it may seem funny, swallowed objects send thousands of folks to the emergency room every year. The most immediate threat is that the object will become lodged in the esophagus (the tube through which food travels from the mouth to the stomach) or the trachea (part of the airway that connects your mouth and nose to your lungs), and interfere with swallowing or breathing, respectively.</p>



<p>If you have difficulty breathing or feel as though you are choking after swallowing anything (food or not), it is extremely important that you seek emergency medical attention. The American Red Cross website has specific recommendations for what to do if a person has a blocked airway. These steps take only minutes to learn, and even small children can use the technique to save a person's life.</p>



<p>If the object (in your case, a quarter) reaches the stomach without getting stuck along the way, it will probably continue along its journey through the digestive tract, leaving you none the worse for wear when it "passes" — usually in four to six days. You can monitor this process by checking your stools for the object. However, see your health care provider if:</p>





- The object has sharp or irregular edges (e.g., pins, pen caps, or fish bones)

- You feel as though something is stuck in your throat or it hurts to swallow

- You experience fever, vomiting, or abdominal pain

- The object is corrosive or toxic. Small batteries (the kind found in watches and hearing aids), especially tempting to children, can cause serious damage in no time

- A child has swallowed a foreign object — children's smaller digestive tracts have less room for foreign objects to safely pass

- The object (swallowed by an adult) is larger than a quarter

- You don't find the object on "poop patrol" within a week

<p>Less commonly, objects that fail to pass on their own may need to be removed either endoscopically (with a special scope that can be guided from the mouth into the stomach or from the anus into the intestine) or, in rare cases, surgically. This type of removal is also necessary for objects that can cause an infection or perforation (poke holes in the digestive tract).</p>



<p>Last but not least, spare yourself some grief in the future by putting that spare change where it ought to go

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— in the bank!</p>#13;

Health topic

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