

## FOREIGN BODIES IN THE EXTERNAL EAR

[Foreign Bodies](#) lodged in the external ear canal are a common situation. These may enter via deliberate insertion or accidental retention, by inadvertent incidents, or by insects entering the ear canal.



Foreign Bodies: Expert removal often needed

### Characteristics

Deliberate insertions are commonplace in childhood, as a result of paediatric body-exploratory activity. Beads, plastic pen tips and other smooth rounded objects are commonly used, alternatively rolled paper or sponge rubber fragments. These objects may remain in place for considerable periods, being relatively asymptomatic, or because the child may be wary of disapproval.

Other objects inserted deliberately (but unintentionally retained) include smaller amounts of ear putty used during water sports or in an attempt to reduce noise exposure. The soft waxy putty may resist mechanical or suction toilet efforts. Also, the tips of some hearing aids may become dislodged and left in the external canal out of reach of the owner.

Cotton buds/Q-tips are a common cause of accidental retention, typically in the case of the habitual ear self-cleaner. These devices are often ineffective in the cleaning role, being more akin to a cannon ramrod, as they are excessively large for most canals, and as firmer wax is simply impacted by their use. Once initiated, infection due to detached cotton wool tips may be perpetuated by their porous nature, and their presence may be obscured by semisolid wax coverage with time.

#### **"Silverton Place"**

101 Wickham Terrace  
Brisbane Qld 4000

P: 07 38397677 F: 07 38325723

#### **Other Locations**

Beenleigh

Sunnybank

Mt Ommaney

Caboolture

Other objects may enter the ear by inadvertent incidents. Sand in the canal after surfing is a common finding. Seeds or other debris may enter airborne in dusty or windy environments. Fragments left after penetrating injuries may also be seen.

Small insects are one of the most common findings. Entering live, the wriggling of the intruder may cause intense discomfort, or severe pain if sharp or spiny protuberances lacerate the canal.

## Treatment

Simple removal suffices in most cases, but infected or bloody sites are cleaned thoroughly and treated with antibiotic cream to minimise infection.

Grasping the object may require specialised instrumentation. Hooks, loops or alligator forceps may be needed for individual situations.

Smooth rounded objects may be difficult to remove, either from deep in the canal, where obtaining a grasp on the object may be difficult, or due to a fractious infant's wriggling to avoid examination. General anaesthetic removal may be needed in these instances.

Faced with the distress of a live insect in the ear, it is best to drown the creature with ear drops or vegetable oil to abolish the movement prior to seeking expert help for removal. The often-barbed legs may impede removal or break off; removal of winged insects is best achieved by traction on a wing as these are normally fixed firmly to the torso.

## More information

- [Foreign Bodies](#)

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