

Common Food Complaints Advice

The Health Protection Team receives many complaints about foreign bodies in food products every year. A number of the items found are either normal parts of the food or harmless contamination, most of which 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 Health Protection Team. The table below details many of the common complaints we receive and the action points are intended to guide you to the best way of dealing with your concerns.

Crystals in canned fish	
Problem	Certain natural elements in fish may develop into crystals during the canning process. These crystals may be mistaken for glass but are often struvite crystals. They are not harmful and are easily destroyed by acids in the stomach although they can also be dissolved in warm vinegar or lemon juice.
Action	Place the crystals in vinegar or lemon juice and gently heat for 15 – 20 minutes. If the crystals do not dissolve, contact the Health Protection Team.
Mould in tinned foods	
Problem	Dented or damaged cans may allow mould growth to occur so avoid buying such cans. Incorrect processing may also allow mould growth.
Action	Contact Health Protection Team
Hide / Skin	
Problem	Some meat products – such as corned beef or cans of stew can contain small pieces of hide or skin often seen as a black object possibly with hairs on it. Whilst unsightly it is not harmful.
Action	Send the hide with the serial number from the packaging to the manufacturer. They will find the information helpful to improve quality control.
Fish – cod worms	
Problem	White fish such as Cod or Haddock may be infested with a small round, brownish looking worm. These are found in the flesh. 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 shop or the manufacturer.
Meat and Poultry	
Problem	Products made from meat and / or poultry may contain small bones, skin, 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	Contact retailer/manufacturer.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetables	
Problem	Fruit and vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. If you are buying fresh unprepared fruit and vegetables, this is quite normal as they originate in our natural environment
Action	Wash fresh fruit and vegetables carefully. If you find any of these foreign bodies on pre-prepared fruit or vegetables (e.g. washed bags of lettuce, prepared fruit salads, stir fry mixes), contact the Health Protection Team.
Plant insects	
Problem	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 thoroughly before use.
Bruised/mouldy fruit and vegetables	
Problem	Mould will naturally occur when fruit and vegetables become bruised and damaged. This 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 before buying and handle and store carefully afterwards. If mould develops quickly despite these checks, return to the supplier.
Mushroom fibres	
Problem	Fibres can often be mistaken for hairs in meals that contain mushrooms, such as mushroom in pizza or lasagne. The most likely source of these fibres are the compost in which the mushrooms are grown and when harvesting occurs, some of the fibres stay attached to the mushrooms. Although unpleasant they are not a food safety hazard.
Action	Contact retailer / manufacturer.
Green potatoes	
Problem	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 in a cool, dark, dry place. Remove any green parts of the potato before eating.
Frozen Fruit and Vegetables	
Problem	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 / manufacturer.

Bakery char	
Problem	Bread and cakes may contain over-cooked dough, which has flaked off bakery tins. It is not necessarily an indicator of poor hygiene, although char 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	If it is char, return to the retailer but if you think it may be rodent droppings contact the Health Protection Team.
Carbonised grease	
Problem	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 / manufacturer.
Seeds and grain	
Problem	Plain white, brown or wholemeal bread may be produced on the same production line as wholegrain or seeded bread and if equipment is not properly cleaned, then the seeds or grains might get into what should be a plain loaf. The seeds may have the appearance of rodent droppings but are safe to eat. This is a quality issue and should be referred to the retailer.
Action	Contact retailer / manufacturer.

Dried Foods	
Problem	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 your new, dried goods in airtight containers. Ensure good ventilation in the kitchen.

Chocolate and Confectionery – bloom	
Problem	Chocolate may develop a light coloured bloom on its surface if stored at too high a temperature. This looks like a creamy powdery coating; it is not mould but is due to cocoa fat separation in the chocolate and is not harmful.
Action	Return to retailer.
Chocolate and Confectionery – crystals	
Problem	Large sugar crystals may form in confectionery and can be mistaken for glass but are usually made of sugar. The crystal will dissolve in warm water.
Action	Test with warm water. If it does not dissolve, notify the Health Protection Team

To contact the Health Protection Team: Call 01962 840222 or email at eh@winchester.gov.uk