

Foreign objects in Food/Common Food Complaints

There are a number of common complaints about foreign objects in food and a number of the items found are either normal constituents of the food or harmless contamination.

Tinned Fish - Struvite

Certain naturally occurring elements in fish may develop into hard crystals during 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 heatedGlass will not!

What should I do?

Heat the foreign body gently in vinegar, if it dissolves you might want to contact the manufacturer to let them know. If the foreign body does not dissolve contact your local Environmental Health Department.

Mould



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

What should I do?

Contact your local Environmental Health Department for further guidance.

Red/Pink Colouration of Cooked Chicken Meat

Sometimes a pink, brown or reddish colouring of poultry meat may occur giving the meat an undercooked appearance. This can be due to myoglobin, a pigment which is rich in iron. Myoglobin is similar to haemoglobin and is found in muscle fibres and may be present in higher concentration near to the bone, leading people to believe that the chicken or turkey has not been cooked through. There are a number of reasons why myoglobin can be present in enough concentration to change the colour of the meat, the method of packaging, cooking and the type of bird that the meat came from are some of the factors. Uncooked meat has a more translucent appearance and the fibres break less easily than cooked meat. Sometimes the dark colour can disappear on contact with air. Uncooked areas will only change colour when cooked further.

What should I do?

Contact your local Environmental Health Department for further guidance.

Cardamom Pods in Pilau rice

Cardamom is the common name for certain plant species native to India and south-eastern Asia. The fruit - pod - is a small capsule with 8 to 16 brown seeds. The seeds are used as a spice or the pods can be used whole in pilau rice. Cardamom pods are sometimes mistaken by members of the public as rodent droppings or cockroaches.

What should I do?

Contact your local Environmental Health Department for further guidance.

Spiders in Bananas



Sometimes, spiders can come to Britain in fruit, vegetables and other products. One species of spider, The Huntsman or Giant Crab Spider, are large, brown, crab-like spiders that have flattened bodies that enable them to fit into very small crevices. This spider lives in tropical and subtropical regions and is common in houses where they eat cockroaches and other insects, but not Europe where it is too cold. It is transported throughout the world in banana shipments. It is harmless, but a large one can deliver a painful bite if carelessly handled.

What should I do?

In the unlikely event that you are bitten contact a doctor.

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.

What should I do?

Send the hide with the serial number from the can to the manufacturer. They will find the information helpful to improve quality control.

Fish - Codworm



White fish such as Cod or Haddock may be infested with a small round, brownish looking worm. These are found in 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.

What should I do?

Return the food to the shop or manufacturer

Meat and Poultry

Skin, Bones

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.

What should I do?

Contact Retailer / Manufacturer

Fresh Vegetables and Fruit - Stones, Soil and Slugs

Fruit and Vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate in the soil.

What should I do? Wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly

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

What should I do? Wash thoroughly before use

Bruised or Mouldy

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.

What should I do? Check produce carefully before purchase and handle and store carefully afterwards

Mushroom Fibre

Sometimes we get complaints about hairs in food such as pizza, often these 'hairs' turn out to be mushroom fibres. The mushroom that we know is actually the fruiting body of the hidden mushroom plant. This plant is made up of microscopic filaments - hyphae - which combine to form strands called mycelium. The mycelium grows in the soil on wood and leaves, or in commercial mushroom farming, compost. The mushroom body first develops as a tiny ball on the mycelium and grows to a certain size before being picked to eat. Sometimes, strands of mycelium can remain with the mushroom during preparation and cooking. When cooked, the fibrous mycelium can look like a coarse hair.

What should I do? Contact Retailer / Manufacturer

Green Potatoes



All potatoes contain natural toxins called glycoalkaloids, usually at low levels. But higher levels of glycoalkaloids can be found in green parts of potatoes, sprouted potatoes and potatoes stored in light. Severe glycoalkaloid poisoning is very rare.

What should I do?

Store potatoes in a dark, cool and dry place and don't eat green or sprouting parts. If you've removed the green parts and the potatoes still taste bitter, don't eat them. And if you come across a green potato crisp, it's probably best not to eat it.

Frozen Vegetables and Fruit - Stones, Soil and Slugs

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

What should I do?

Contact Retailer / Manufacturer

Bakery Goods - Bakery Char (Carbon)

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 or grey and comes in uneven shapes.

What should I do?

Contact Retailer / Manufacturer

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.

What should I do?

Contact Retailer / Manufacturer

Seeds and Grain

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. The presence of seeds/grain on a bread product which is not labelled as containing them can be a particular risk for those consumers who may be allergic to the seed/grain.

What should I do?

Contact your local Environmental Health Department for further guidance



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.

What should I do?

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.

Chocolate and Confectionery – Whitish coating on chocolate (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.

What should I do? Return to Retailer

Crystals

Large sugar crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. These are generally sugar in content. The crystal will dissolve in warm water.

What should I do?

Test with warm water. If it does not dissolve, notify your local Environmental Health Department.

White spots in tinned grapefruit

Sometimes, tinned grapefruit will be covered in white specks that look like mould. Also the liquid in the tin may be cloudy. This is actually a natural constituent of the grapefruit called "Naringin" and it gives the fruit its distinctive bitter taste. Variations in the weather cause an increase in the amount of Naringin the fruit contains and when canned, this excess Naringin crystalizes out. The product is safe to eat and there is no health risk.

What should I do?

Contact Retailer / Manufacturer

Wine Crystals



Tartrate Crystals; also known as "wine diamonds" are a natural product of the wine, and form when the wine gets too cold. Simply sift the crystals out of the wine. The crystals are not harmful in any way.

What should I do?

Contact Retailer

If glass: possible public health risk – contact your local Environmental Health Department.