

PICA



- Pronounced "PIKE-ah," pica gets its name from a bird species, the Eurasian magpie (the formal Latin name for that species is *Pica pica*). This bird has a reputation for eating unusual objects.
- Pica is an eating disorder in which a person eats things not usually considered food for example, dirt, soap, chalk, stones, faeces, paper, paint, hair, ice, plastic, plants, grass, shampoo, toys, hair, plaster, clothing, thread, coins, etc.
- Young children often put non-food items (like grass or toys) in their mouths because they're curious about the world around them. But children with pica go beyond that.
- Pica is usually diagnosed from 2 years and upwards
- Pica is more common in certain groups of the population and occurs more frequently in children with learning difficulties. It is associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder.
- When non-food items are eaten in large amounts, they can cause blockages in the stomach. Certain things like glass and rubber bands can cause damage to the stomach and intestines. Other health problems from pica include:

High lead levels in the blood from eating items containing lead (e.g., paint chips, etc.)

Nutrition problems

Poisoning due to ingestion of common household items such as cleaning products Infections in the mouth, stomach or intestines

Wearing down of the teeth

- Health professionals who can diagnose Pica include paediatricians, gastroenterologists, psychiatrists and/or clinical psychologists.
- Some possible reasons why Pica starts could include:
 - ❖ lack of awareness of what is, and is not, a food
 - ❖ to gain attention or avoid a demand
 - ❖ to relieve anxiety or distress
 - ❖ for social attention
 - ❖ to obtain or escape something
 - ❖ a lack of adequate nutrition
 - ❖ for sensory feedback.



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PICA Strategies



- Keep a list of the items your child eats or mouths. Share the list with your child's G.P, teachers or other caregivers.
- Keep track of how often your child displays pica behavior in a notebook.
- Keep a list of the places and situations where your child puts things in his/her mouth.
- Put locks on cabinets, closets or doors that contain possible pica objects.
- Hoover or sweep floors daily to reduce items on the floor that your child might eat.
- Provide safe alternatives to chew/bite and eat.
- Include information about pica in medical records, care plans and education and health care plans (EHCPs).
- Place cups of vegetables/salad in the garden to reduce plant eating.
- Use distraction at the supermarket by giving them a punnet of vegetables (or alternative) to eat. This can prevent them taking other items from the shelves or other people's trolleys. The staff will get used to you passing empty packets through the checkout!
- Record pica items and watch for them in the individual's stools.
- Keep items with small rubber parts - for example thermostats, alarms, remote control - out of the way.
- Learn about poisonous plants and remove from garden, school playground
- A box of edible items that mimic the texture and appearance of the non-food items that they tend to go for For example, crushed biscuits instead of sand, raisins and seeds instead of dirt, marshmallow instead of mattress stuffing, rice paper instead of paper, spinach leaves instead of plants, granola instead of rocks, beef jerky instead of bark, love hearts instead of chalk, cookie dough or soft brownie instead of faeces, twiglets and veg sticks instead of twigs etc.
- Chew toys
- Edible Sensory Play
- Nutritional supplements - speak to your GP or paediatrician to see if this would be helpful.
- Calming and Soothing activities
- Oral Motor Activities i.e blow painting, cotton ball blowing, whistles. Lots of ideas on your youtube channel
- Teach edible and inedible; where possible increasing awareness with the child can be helpful



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