

# PICA

**Pica is defined as the compulsive and recurrent consumption of non-nutritive/non-food items. The term pica is derived from the Latin word for the bird “magpie”, a bird known for consuming food and non-food items alike. A pica event occurs when the non-food item is swallowed/ingested.**

## **Pica Attempt**

A pica attempt occurs when an individual tries to ingest (swallow) the non-nutritive/non-food item but the item is not ingested for any particular reason, such as the individual is stopped by staff before ingestion occurs. Both pica and pica attempts involve intent to swallow the non-food item.

## **Mouthing**

Mouthing items is not considered pica. It involves placing non-food items in the mouth and manipulating them without the intent to ingest the item.

## **When is Pica suspected?**

- Non-food items are consumed repeatedly despite efforts to curtail the behavior.
- The behavior is considered inappropriate for the individual’s developmental and/or chronological age.
- It is not an accepted cultural practice.
- The behavior is a symptom of another mental health disorder and is of sufficient concern to warrant medical attention.



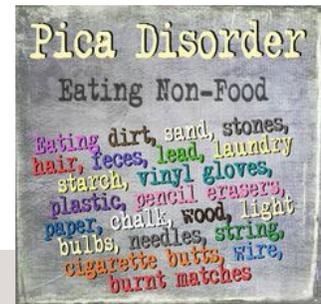
Pica can occur due to medical conditions such as anemias, gastrointestinal concerns such as GERD, use of G-tube, or dialysis.

Pica can occur during the course of another mental health disorder (e.g., Schizophrenia, Borderline Personality Disorder, etc), and can warrant independent clinical attention.

Pica can be a learned behavior that achieves a specific result for the person when he/she engages in the practice.

## Pica and Developmental Disabilities/ Intellectual Disabilities

Pica is observed with a high frequency in individuals diagnosed with DD/ID.



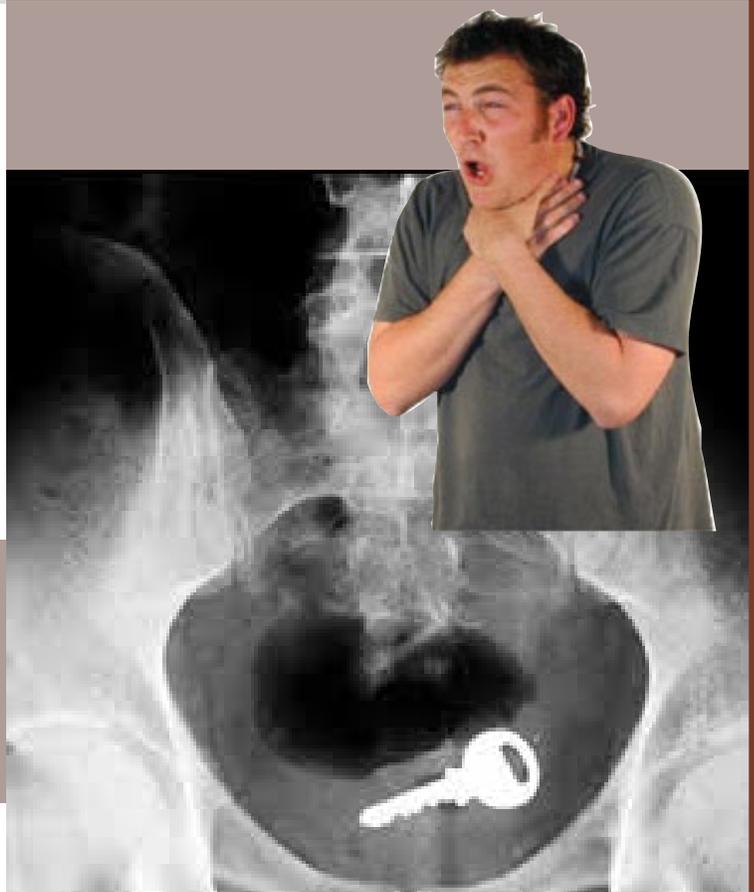
### Possible reasons for occurrence of Pica among the DD/ID population



- Medical Issues
- Learned behavior
- Inability to discriminate food and non-food items
- Other psychiatric conditions
- Mineral deficiencies
- Dietary/Caloric intake deficiencies
- Loss of opportunity to eat by mouth
- Dementia

### Risks From Pica

- Dental/Mouth Injuries
- Choking/Aspiration
- Ulceration and Perforation of esophagus and/or stomach
- Poisoning
- Bowel Blockage



## Management and Precautions

- ❑ Assess Pica with a medical team first and foremost to rule out medical issues.
  - If it is a medical issue, ensure appropriate treatment begins as soon as possible.
- ❑ Assess Pica from with a behavioral team after medical rule out has been completed and cleared.
  - If Pica is a behavioral concern, it will require a functional behavior assessment to pinpoint the function/reason of the behavior. This will help to ensure that appropriate treatment is identified as well we as appropriate functional replacement behavior. Additionally, functional communication training may be put in place and taught to the individual.
- ❑ Environmental strategies can be implemented to prevent occurrence of pica.
  - Discuss any and all changes to environment with the appropriate Human Rights Committee (HRC) and/or Behavior Management Committee (BMC) for approvals.
  - Identify item(s) that are ingested
  - Alert all who work or live with individual of pica diagnosis and inform them of items that the person ingests or is likely to ingest.
  - Clear the environment of the items that the person is known to ingest (with HRC approval).
  - Block and redirect pica attempts using approved and trained strategies by agency.
  - Individual may require additional strategies with approval of Interdisciplinary Team and Agency.
  - Individual may require a behavior support plan.



## What to do if Pica event occurs

- ❑ If individual ingests non-food item(s), medical assistance must be accessed, call 911.
- ❑ An unusual incident report must be completed.
- ❑ Communicate details concerning the event to medical professionals and agency staff.

### Sources

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Stiegler, Lillian N. (2005) Understanding Pica Behavior: A Review for Clinical and Education Professionals. Focus on autism and other developmental disabilities. Volume 20 (27-38).

Carter, S.L., Wheeler, J.J., Mayton, M.R. (2004). Pica: A Review of Recent Assessment and Treatment Procedures. Education and Training in Developmental Disabilities. Volume 39 (346-358).

Mace, F.C. & Knight, D. (1986). Functional Analysis and Treatment of Severe Pica. Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. Volume 19 (411-416).

Piazza, C.C., Fisher, W.W., Hanley, G.P., LeBlanc, L.A., Wordsell, A.S, Lindauer, S.E. & Keeney, K.M. (1998) Treatment of Pica Through Multiple Analyses of its Reinforcing Functions. Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. Volume 31 (165-186).

McCord, B.E., Grosser, J.W., Iwata, B.A., Powers, L.A. (2005). An Analysis of Response-Blocking Parameters in the Prevention of Pica. Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis. Volume 38 (391-394).