



Splinter Care

(and other skin foreign bodies)

What it is?

A foreign body (FB) is any object (e.g., splinter, fishhook, glass shard) that becomes embedded in the skin. Splinters are a common type of FB, especially in children. Thankfully, most splinters and FB's can be managed at home with proper care, but some cases require medical attention to prevent complications.

Cause

Foreign bodies can occur due to contact with wood or plants (e.g., splinters, cactus spines, or thorns), accidents with metal objects (e.g., needles, nails, pins), stepping on glass or plastic fragments, or exposure to fiberglass or plant stickers.

Treatment

Tiny and pain free

These can often be left in place as they may naturally work their way out during skin shedding or form a pimple that drains on its own.

Painful or large

- **Clean the Area:** Wash the skin with soap and water. Avoid soaking wood splinters, as they can swell.
- **Use Tape for Small Spines:** Touch the area lightly with sticky tape or use wax hair remover if tape doesn't work.
- **Remove Larger Splinters:** Use sterilized tweezers or a needle to carefully expose and pull out the splinter at the angle it entered. Ensure good lighting and a steady grip.
- **After Removal:** Wash the area again and apply an OTC antibiotic ointment like Polysporin/Neosporin/Bacitracin/Triple Antibiotic ointment to prevent infection.

Symptoms of infection

- Redness or swelling
- Warmth around the site
- Pus or drainage
- Increasing pain
- Red streaks spreading from the area.
- Fever

When to call

Immediately:

- Deeply embedded or barbed objects (e.g., fishhooks)
- Severe pain or inability to remove the object
- Signs of infection (redness, swelling, pus)
- A deep puncture wound, and tetanus vaccine is outdated (>5 years since Dtap/DT/Tdap)

During Office Hours:

- You have additional concerns or questions
- The object was removed but the area becomes more painful or looks infected
- Symptoms worsen