



University of North Carolina Wilmington
Abrons Student Health Center

INSTRUCTION SHEET: FOREIGN BODY LEFT IN WOUND

The Student Health Provider has treated you today for a wound. An object (foreign body) remains inside the wound. The decision has been made to leave the object in place, at least for now.

Many people have foreign bodies left in their bodies. Bullets and shrapnel (pieces of metal) are often left in place — as long as the objects do not harm or bother people, leaving them in place is often safer and wiser.

The decision to remove or leave a foreign object inside the body depends on many factors: type of object (metal/glass/other?), size of the object (big or small?), and the location (deep/just under the skin or is it in the foot or hand where use of the foot or hand will cause discomfort?).

Removing a foreign body is often like looking for a needle in a haystack. An object can move far away from the site it enters the body, making it hard to find. Blood and tissue surround the object, making it hard to see.

Risks and benefits are considered in deciding whether to remove or leave an object in place. In your case, the risks are felt to outweigh the benefits, at least for now.

MEASURES YOU SHOULD TAKE TO HELP TREAT YOUR WOUND:

1. Rest the affected part as possible.
2. Elevate the area above the level of your heart the first two days. Elevation minimizes swelling and pain.
3. Over-the-counter pain medications can help relieve discomfort associated with your wound. Acetaminophen (Tylenol), ibuprofen, or naproxen can be taken, depending on individual preference.
4. Clean the wound daily with soap and water. After cleaning, re-dress the wound. Apply over-the-counter antibacterial ointment and cover the wound with gauze.
5. When changing the dressing, inspect the wound for signs of infection: pus on the wound, increasing redness/swelling/warmth around the wound, or red streaks spreading from the wound. If you suspect infection is present, return to the Student Health Center or see your personal/referral doctor *promptly*.
6. If you have continuing problems with the area, schedule a follow-up appointment with your personal/referral doctor. Seek care if you have continuing discomfort with movement or use of the site, or if you wish another opinion on the risks/benefits of removal. Return to the Student Health Center if you have difficulty obtaining a follow-up appointment.