

# Common Food Complaints

This document provides a brief summary of some of the problems that consumers may find associated with foods that they buy. Please use the links to take you to the relevant part of the document:

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## Canned foods

### Field insects, wasps and fruit flies

Insects that live naturally in fields may be harvested along with fruit and vegetables. Whilst food companies take steps to remove these insects, some will slip through the net. These insects and grubs are killed and sterilised by the canning process so there is no public health risk – please contact the manufacturer of the product if you want to discuss these.

### Larvae in vegetables

Small grubs are often found in canned vegetables, particularly tomatoes and sweetcorn. Their colour is often cream to greenish brown with long dark and pale bands, but this is variable. They can be up to 4cm in length. People think they may be maggots or caterpillars. These are moth larvae that live inside the food, and so are difficult to see during growing and processing. They are killed and sterilised by the canning process and so are not a health risk. Every effort is made to control these pests during growing but EEC Directives fix maximum levels of pesticide residues in food and to decrease their happening, more insecticides would have to be used. Contact the manufacturer of the product if you want to discuss these.

### 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 crystallizes out. The product is safe to eat and there is no health risk. If you wish to discuss this, please contact the manufacturer of the product.

### Mould

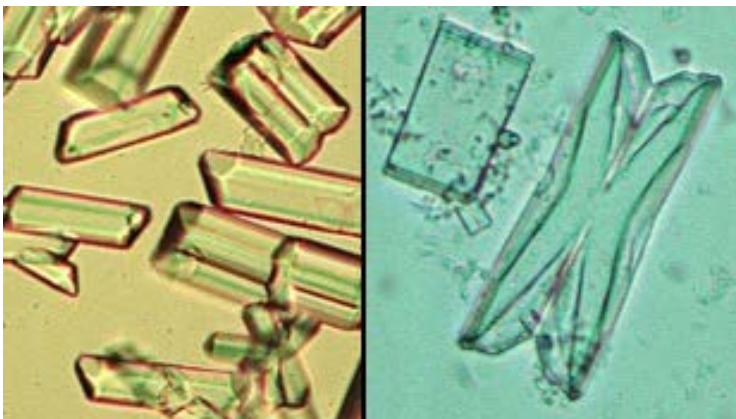
Dented, damaged or incorrectly processed cans may allow mould growth to occur. This could indicate an error in production or storage. It can be difficult to establish where the damage may have occurred and therefore who is responsible, and it may not be the fault of the manufacturer or retailer. There may be a public health risk associated with this, so please contact us for advice.

## Glass-like crystals in canned fish

Certain naturally occurring elements commonly found in fish may develop into hard crystals during the canning process. They are a harmless compound of magnesium ammonium phosphate. It is especially common in canned salmon. These crystals maybe mistaken for glass fragments and are called struvite. They are not harmful and will be broken down by stomach acids when swallowed.

You can tell the difference between Struvite and glass by doing simple tests at home; Struvite crystals are softer than glass and can be scratched or crushed between two hard surfaces into a powder.

If you look under a magnifying glass the edges are smooth where broken glass will be irregular. (Image from [stoke.gov.uk](http://stoke.gov.uk))



Struvite crystals are soluble in a hot dilution of vinegar or lemon juice) and water. Glass will not dissolve.

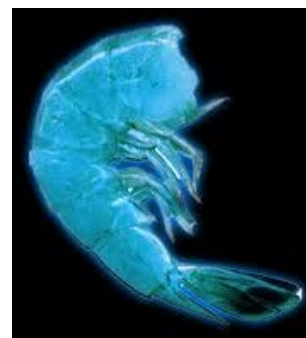
Finding Struvite is actually quite rare, despite the large volumes of fish produced each year. As yet no procedure has been successful in preventing it happening, even the addition of polyphosphates is not 100% effective and most people do not want any more additives in food.

If the crystal does not dissolve or crush, then it could be glass and please contact us for advice. If it is Struvite, we would advise you to eat the product as normal, but if you are still concerned, please contact the manufacturer of the product.

## Fish

### Glowing fish

Luminous bacteria can sometimes be found on seafood. Crabmeat, cooked shrimps, prawns or processed seafood products made from surimi are the most common seafood associated with luminescence or glowing. When seafood glows it means that luminous bacteria are present, the light is produced by a reaction with a substance in the bacteria, oxygen and water, similar to the reaction which makes fireflies glow. It does not mean the seafood is unsafe or of low quality. There are no reports of illness from luminous marine bacteria growing on seafood, and they are not radioactive!



You should contact the manufacturer/retailer if you wish to discuss this.

## Cod worm

White fish such as cod or haddock may be infested with small, round brownish- yellow worms. These worms, known scientifically as *Phocanema decipiens* are found in the flesh.

There is no evidence that anyone has ever had an illness associated with the cod worm. The worms are killed by the cooking and freezing process and are harmless. Occasionally, in fresh fish a worm may be discovered alive, however, although they are alarming to see, they are harmless if consumed. There is no public health risk so please contact the manufacturer/retailer if you wish to discuss.



The incidence of infected fish is very small in relation to the thousands of tonnes of fish landed each year.

## Fish bones

Fish naturally contain bones. Whilst the manufacturers take every care to remove these bones, in products such as fish fingers a few may remain due to the way that the fish fingers are manufactured. Bones from a certain part of the fish may resemble a piece of plastic, being broad, flat and flexible in appearance. As long as the manufacturer has taken all reasonable steps to remove the bones, then we cannot take formal action.

## Vegetables & Fruit

### Stones, soil & slugs

Fruit and vegetables commonly have soil, stones or small slugs adhering to them. This is quite normal as they originate in the soil. This is not a public health risk, but you should wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly.

### Greenfly

Salad vegetables (especially lettuce) may have greenfly attached. Greenfly are difficult to wash off but are not harmful. They are not a public health risk; in fact they demonstrate that the salad is fresh.

### Mould

Mould growth will naturally occur when fruit and vegetables become damaged and bruised, or if stored for too long. There is no public health risk and we recommend that you check the produce before purchase and return to the retailer if you wish to discuss.

## Insects in jam

These are usually wasps or fruit flies. These insects are naturally associated with fruit and fruit growing areas. As they are small and light, some will inevitably get past the inspection process. They do not carry disease and are not a health risk.

## Larvae in vegetables

The same information for larvae in canned foods applies to frozen foods, these are not harmful.

## Mouldy juice cartons

Evidence of mould may be a result of poor food hygiene and warrant a formal investigation. However there may be other causes and please check the following information first - what is the use by date on the product and has the product been stored correctly? On investigation, some products are found to be out of date or to have been stored at incorrect temperatures. Also, the packaging may be dented or have holes in it and it may be difficult to establish where this has happened and may not be the fault of the manufacturer or retailer. Please contact us for advice if you are not sure how to check the product packaging.

# Chocolate/Confectionery

## Bloom

Chocolate may develop a light coloured bloom if stored at too high a temperature. It is not mould but due to fat separation. It is not harmful. If you wish to discuss this, please return the product to the retailer.

## Crystals

Large crystals may form in confectionery and may be mistaken for glass. The crystals will dissolve in warm water and are not a public health risk. If you wish to discuss, please return the product to the retailer.

# Dried Foods

## Insects

Insects like beetles and weevils may infest dried products such as flour, sugar and pulses if they are stored too long. These do not carry disease, but they breed very quickly in warm, humid conditions and spread into uncontaminated food very quickly. They are not a public health risk.

Do not use an insecticide because of the danger of contaminating your food but dispose of all visibly infested packages in an outside waste bin. Thoroughly clean the cupboards using a vacuum cleaner paying particular attention to crevices, and immediately afterwards, empty the vacuum

cleaner into an outside waste bin. Store new dried goods in airtight containers and ensure good ventilation in storage areas.

## Psocids - Small insects in flour

Psocids are tiny grey or brown insects the size of a pin head, found in dried products such as flour and sugar. Psocids prefer warm, dark humid conditions such as the folds of packaging in domestic food cupboards, so products are usually affected in the home, not at the shop or manufacturer. However, if a shop has a poor turnover of goods and old stock is not rotated for sale before new products, the problem may arise. They do not cause disease and are not a health risk.

The action we advise is to:

- remove the infected food and throw away outside;
- check all remaining food including the labels and throw away as necessary;
- clean the cupboard with a dry cloth making sure it is completely dry before replacing any food - use a hairdryer if necessary; and
- in future, always keep food cupboards well ventilated and dry and store vulnerable foods in washable, covered containers

If you have only just purchased the product from a shop and you believe the problem came from there, please contact us for advice.

## Bakery Goods

### Bakery char

Bread and cakes may contain irregular shaped bits of overcooked dough which has flaked off bakery tins. Occasionally some may become incorporated into dough giving areas of the product a grey/greasy appearance. Often the drops are mistaken for rodent droppings which are black and torpedo shaped. This is not a public health risk and you should contact the manufacturer/retailer to discuss.

### Carbonated grease

The machinery used to produce bread and cakes is lubricated with a non-toxic vegetable oil. Occasionally some may become incorporated into dough giving areas of the product a grey/greasy appearance and you may suspect there is dirt or oil in their food. This is not a public health risk and you should contact the manufacturer to discuss.

## **Meat**

### **Skin, bone or other animal material**

Products made from meat and/or poultry may contain small bones, skin, hair, bristles or parts of blood vessels. These are unsightly but rarely a health hazard, as they are normal parts of the animal of origin. You should contact the manufacturer to discuss these.

## **Chicken**

### **Red leg**

A natural pigment held within the bone being released after cooking and taking on the appearance of meat not being correctly cooked causes red leg in cooked chicken. The chicken will be thoroughly cooked but the temperature is not high enough to denature the pigment. Ensure the chicken is thoroughly cooked and the juices are running clear.

## **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. If you believe it is not crystals, but glass contamination, please contact us.

### **Corked Wine**

Cork is a natural product, which is an ideal closure for wine, but occasionally the cork could be diseased and affect the taste of the wine. This disease is not harmful and is called "Trichlorinanisole" (TCA). It is extremely difficult to detect during manufacture and unfortunately also evades detection during the inspection procedures suppliers of the wine carry out before the wine is bottled. Unfortunately, TCA which is found naturally in cork, can be detected by the human nose at just one part per million, so when it is present you know about it.

## Durability Dates

### 'Use by date'

'Use by' means exactly that. You shouldn't use any food or drink after the end of the 'use by' date shown on the label. Even if it looks and smells fine, food should not be sold or used after this date as there is a public health risk. You will usually find a 'use by' date on food that goes off quickly, such as milk, soft cheese, ready-prepared salads and smoked fish.

It's also important to follow any storage instructions given on food labels, otherwise the food might not last until the 'use by' date. Usually food with a 'use by' date needs to be kept in the fridge.

Some food labels also give instructions such as 'eat within a week of opening' and it's important to follow these instructions. But remember, if the 'use by' date is tomorrow, then you must use the food by the end of tomorrow, even if the label says 'eat within a week of opening' and you have only opened the food today.

'Display until' and 'sell by' dates are instructions for shop staff to tell them when they should take a product off the shelves.

### 'Best before date'

'Best before' dates are usually used on foods that last longer, such as frozen, dried or canned foods. It should be safe to eat food after the 'best before' date, but the food will no longer be at its best. After this date, the food might begin to lose its flavour and texture but there is no public health risk.

However, if you eat eggs after their best before date, you will need to make sure you cook both the yolk and the white thoroughly and they must be used within 2 days of their best before date.

## Labelling

The fundamental rule of the labelling of foodstuffs is that consumers should not be misled. Detailed labelling of a product educates consumers as to the exact nature and characteristics of the foodstuff and enables them to make a more informed choice. Further information about food labelling can be found on the Food Standards Agency website.