

Department of Gastroenterology

Video capsule endoscopy: retained capsule

What is a retained capsule?

Occasionally the video capsule that you have swallowed can be stuck in the intestine and not pass through the system. This happens in as many as 1 in every 25 people who have the test. However, at Addenbrooke's hospital, we have not had any incidents of retained capsule after 50 studies.

Why does it get stuck?

There may be a narrowing in the intestine that the capsule is too large to pass through. This can be due to a disease of the intestine or kinking of the bowel due to scar tissue from previous operations.

Can a retained capsule be prevented?

In theory, it should be possible to rule out any narrowed areas in the intestine using an X-ray test called a 'small bowel follow through'. This test involves drinking a liquid called barium that shows up on X-ray. However, the test is not very good at picking up problems in the small intestine. More than half of the people who have experienced a retained capsule have had a barium X-ray beforehand that has not picked up the narrowing. Many hospitals now only recommend a barium X-ray before a capsule endoscopy if the patient has symptoms of blockages or has undergone previous operations on the abdomen.

What happens to a retained capsule?

If the capsule comes across a narrowed area that it cannot pass, it stays above the narrowing. It does not get stuck fast like a cork in a bottle, and it does not constitute an emergency – capsules have been retained for weeks or months without causing any problems.

How do I know whether the capsule has been retained?

You will not know whether the capsule has been retained or not, as a retained capsule does not cause any symptoms. The only way it is possible to know is if the capsule has

reached the large bowel – or colon – by the end of the recording time. If so, it is most likely to pass without problem. Sometimes, the capsule has not reached the end of the small intestine by the end of the recording time, and we may ask you to return to the hospital after seven to ten days for an X-ray of the abdomen to see if it is still present.

How do you remove a retained capsule?

If the capsule has become retained because of a narrowed area that is caused by inflammation, then by treating the inflammation the capsule can sometimes pass through. This can only be shown on repeated X-rays, and can take some weeks. However, if the capsule is retained by a narrowing that it is unlikely to pass, then a keyhole operation may be needed to remove it.

Is there a 'positive' side to having a retained capsule?

It is a nuisance and a cause of some concern to have a retained capsule. However, in the majority of cases the narrowing that has held up the capsule has been the cause of the problem that the test was investigating. If the narrowing is so tight that a capsule cannot pass, before long food would also be getting blocked and the retained capsule has highlighted the problem at an earlier and possibly more convenient time. In cases where the retained capsule is due to a tumour, detecting this earlier may be a blessing.

Who will tell me whether the capsule has been retained?

The doctor reading the test will contact you with the result of the examination and will recommend that you return for an X-ray of the abdomen if there is any suspicion of a retained capsule.

In the meantime, it is important that you do not undergo a test called a 'Magnetic resonance' or MRI scan, as the metal in the capsule can interfere with the test and could be harmful to you. Once the capsule has passed, this test is quite safe. A retained capsule will not interfere with pacemakers, mobile phones, wireless computer networks or shop anti-theft devices. It will, however, set off airport metal detectors.

Where can I find more information about retained capsules?

If you have any further questions or concerns, then you should contact Dr Jeremy Woodward, consultant gastroenterologist at Addenbrooke's Hospital

- Box 133
- Telephone number: 01223-596231.

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format:
01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Potete chiedere di ottenere queste informazioni in altre lingue, in stampato grande o in audiocassetta.

Italian

若你需要本信息的繁體中文、大字體或音訊格式的版本，請要求索取。

Cantonese

तमने आ माळिती वीछ भाषाओमां, मोटा अक्षरोमां अथवा सांभली शकाय जेवा माध्यम
(ओडीओ इमेज)मां जेठती छोय तो कृपा करीने पूछो.

Gujarati

تکایہ پرسیار بکے نہ گہر نہ وزانیاریہت دہوی بہ زمانیکی تر , بہ بیٹی گہورہ یانیش بہ شیوہی دہنگ

Kurdish

آگر آپ کو یہ معلومات دوسری زبانوں میں، بڑے الفاظ کی اشاعت میں یا آڈیو ٹیپ پر درکار ہوں تو براۓ مہربانی اس کیلئے درخواست کریں۔

Urdu



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For advice on quitting, contact your GP or the NHS smoking helpline free, 0800 169 0 169

Document history

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