

## What is Pica?

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (Fourth Edition), “The essential feature of Pica is the eating of one or more nonnutritive substances for a period of at least 1 month. The typical substances ingested tend to vary with age. Infants and younger children typically eat paint, plaster, string, hair or cloth. Older children may eat animal droppings, sand, insects, leaves or pebbles. Adolescents may consume clay or soil.”

## What is Pica-Like behavior in PWS?

Pica-like behavior can include all of the examples given above but it does not constitute a separate diagnosis of Pica. On rare occasions people with PWS (of all ages) will engage in eating objects that have no nutritive value. In addition to the examples given above, in some very rare cases a person with PWS will eat their own feces. Some parents or caregivers find this behavior very difficult to talk about with others. But it is no different than any other Pica-like behavior. It just happens to be an object many feel uncomfortable talking about. If your loved one engages in feces eating, or any other kind of Pica-like behavior, please contact a PWSA (USA) Crisis Intervention Counselor (800-926-4797) for suggestions on how to respond. If you see a consistent pattern of eating non-nutritive objects for at least a month it is always a good idea to seek a psychiatric evaluation to determine whether or not an actual Pica diagnosis exists. This information is very helpful to know for treatment purposes.