What is Pica?

- Pica is an eating disorder typically defined by constant ingestion of non-food items such as hair, dirt, paint chips and so forth.
- Behavior occurs at least one month with the behavior progressing.
- Pica is the most common eating disorder among those with mental disabilities.
- 20% of people between ages 10-20, treated at mental health clinics are reported to have Pica.
So who else is at risk?

- Pregnant women, during the first trimester!
- It’s less common, but pregnant women may crave something non-food
- Note* - You should not diagnose children under the age of 2 with Pica. Mouthing items is a normal part of development and exploration of senses for children.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QT6tNCtiG1o
Recap

What did people consume?
- Sand, couch cushions, toilet paper, glass, dry wall, air freshener, cat hair, plastic bags, urine, and animal blood!

Quotes
- “It makes me comfortable”
- “It makes me feel relaxed”
- “I need it to start of my ____day”
Etiology and Psychopathology

The causes for Pica:

- Gastrointestinal distress—individuals usually crave earthy things like dirt, or cornstarch.
- Usually these non-food items make their stomach pH increase and become basic; therefore, it soothes their stomach
- Malnutrition & Iron deficiency anemia—Individuals who are not able to process or lack iron usually eat clay to counterbalance the deficiency
- Neurological condition—Patients with this type of pica consume non-food items as a means of replacement of their addictions

Obsessive compulsive disorder—These individuals consume non-food items to ease their tensions or soothe their anxiety

Mental disorders

Stress/depression
Pica is a sign that the body is trying to correct a significant nutrient deficiency!

There is no set checklist guideline to “diagnose” Pica, but there are possible warning signs!

- The persistent eating, over a period of at least one month, of substances that are not food and do not provide nutritional value
- The ingestion of the substance(s) is not a part of culturally supported or socially normative practice
- Typical substances ingested tend to vary with age and availability
- Blood test for iron, zinc and anemia
Pathophysiology

The Effects of Pica in Health:

Can lead to intoxication

Nutrition deficiency

Constipation

Tearing in the lining of the esophagus and even intestines!
Treatment

- Pica is usually connected to another type of ED and does not have its own diagnosis.
- When it was first known the term non nutritive was used to identify individuals with Pica.
- However, it later changed to non-food to identify individuals with pica.
- It created confusion when it came to treatment because non nutritive meant individuals were still consuming food items while individuals with pica did not consuming food items; therefore, non-food is a term used for pica individuals.
How to treat Pica

There is no set treatment

- Treatment is determined by the severity of the behavior.
- Identifying the trigger(s) to Pica
- Lower how often one persists to the behavior
- If the person is consuming something harmful then they are at a higher risk for complications
- Patient receives therapy
- A doctor is necessary to monitor their health
- Patient receives nutrition education to improve their health

How to intervene

- In therapy patients receive behavioral therapy
  - The patient and their non food item is present and the individuals helping them simply stays there to watch
- This usually prevents the patient from eating, and lessens their behavior to consume these non food items
- They are forced to deal with the emotions and work to resolve them
- Patients are given antidepressants or any mood stabilizers to prevent the behavior
- If it has to do with deficiencies they are given micronutrient therapy
Recovery

- Pica can stop for children and pregnant women after being induced to treatment.
- Those that relapse after recovery are the patients with mental and developmental disorders. Medication can help to reduce the need of eating non-food items.
- Positive reinforcement from family and loved ones make the recovery for Pica most successful.


Content Questions

- How do you suppose someone’s body would react if they had a severe case of pica and continued to follow a strict diet of non-food items and at what point does someone realize they need real food?
- What nutritional deficiency is most prevalent in the victims of Pica? How does this deficiency affect the health of the individuals?
- When it pertains to treatment how do individuals with pica differentiate from those who consume non nutritive foods?