

What are Water Beads?

Written by Beth Summers, MD, PhD, in collaboration with St. Mary of the Woods BSN Nursing students

Water beads are water-absorbing beads made from super absorbent polymer, often marketed as toys or learning aids.

Water beads have many names, including but not limited to jelly beads, water orbs, hydro orbs, polymer beads, gel beads, and Orbeez. When these tiny balls are placed in water, they can expand up to 200 times their original size. They only shrink back down to size when left to dry. They come in various colors and shapes like spheres, jewels, dinosaurs, etc.

Water beads can be used as educational tools and a form of entertainment for young children and children living with autism or increased anxiety. At the younger end of the spectrum, these beads can further develop sensory skills and hand-eye coordination. With a little more age, children can use water beads to make/play various games and practice math skills such as addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.



Water beads

Benefits of using water beads:

- Develop sensory skills and increase hand-eye coordination
- Improve counting, sorting, and matching skills
- Kinesthetically learn to differentiate between colors

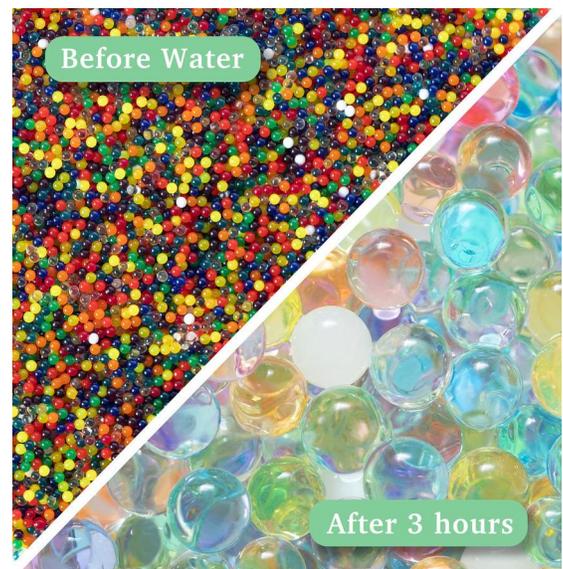
Educational, but Requires Supervision

Water beads hold potential to educate and entertain children, but they may also pose a serious safety risk.

The shape and color of water beads make them look uncannily similar to various candies often marketed to children. The younger the child, the more difficult it is for them to differentiate between the two. If swallowed, water beads can continue growing in size as they travel through the intestines because they don't dissolve; ultimately, this may lead to an obstruction of the gastrointestinal tract. Unfortunately, there are also multiple reported cases of children putting Water beads in their ears. The beads are often difficult to see, especially if they are clear beads. In some cases, the beads could only be removed surgically and lead to ear drum damage or some form of hearing loss.

Water beads can be educational and endlessly entertaining for kids, but they should be kept out of reach from toddlers or anyone under the age of five. If there is any chance of a toddler getting ahold of water beads, it's recommended to completely remove all water beads from that environment. The best way to have fun with water beads and stay as safe as possible is to maintain constant supervision and/or hand on interaction.

Should a situation arise in which your child needs to be admitted to a hospital, remember Hendricks Regional Health is home to Hendricks County's only designated pediatric unit, specially designed to treat children. Our experienced staff is available 24/7 to care for all ages from birth to 18 years.



Signs and Symptoms a Bead May Have Been Swallowed

- Refusing to eat
- Drooling
- Abdominal Swelling and soreness
- Wheezing
- Complaints that something is stuck in the throat or chest
- Vomiting
- Constipation