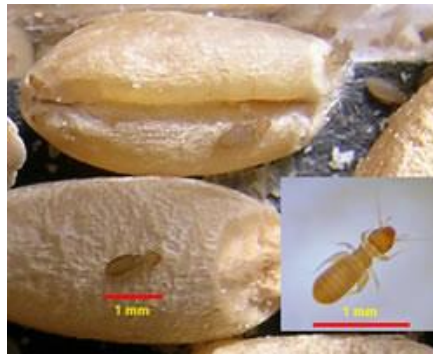


## Food Complaints - PSOCIDS



From time to time people find that their food cupboards have become infested with tiny grey or brown insects. These are often found on the packaging of dry goods such as flour, milk powder, sugar or semolina. It is natural, but often incorrect, to assume that the products themselves are always at fault.

### **What are Psocids?**

Psocids – or booklice – are common but harmless insects between 1 and 2 mm long, which can survive in dry powdery foods. They are not caused by poor hygiene, and are just as common in the cleanest of homes be they old or new.

### **What are their ideal conditions?**

Psocids prefer to live in dark, warm, humid places – such as the folds of packaging in food cupboards. They feed on a wide variety of dry food products - such as flour - and also the microscopic moulds that develop in humid conditions. They may live for about 6 months during which time the female may lay up to 100 eggs. In warm conditions they can rapidly increase in number.

### **Appearance**

Adult — Size varies according to species. 1–2 mm long. Pale yellow–brown to dark brown in colour.

Nymphs — very small, often appear transparent. No larval stages.

### **What causes them?**

They prefer areas with high humidity but can tolerate dry conditions for some days. The kitchen is likely to provide the conditions they need and fitted cupboards provide darkness, which attracts them. Some food products, including flour, naturally contain some moisture; moisture in the home can be caused by not having enough ventilation in the kitchen or bathroom.

### **Are they harmless?**

Psocids do not cause disease and are not a health risk.

### **How do I prevent or remove them?**

It is best to keep all dry foods in cool larders or cupboards with ventilation. If this is not possible, make sure that your cupboards are always free from condensation and damp. If you notice that condensation occurs in your kitchen, particularly during cooking or washing, open your windows. If the problem is continual it may be necessary to take additional precautions. Advice on preventing condensation should be sought from the local Environmental Health Department.

If you discover any insects, do not use an insecticide because of the danger of contamination your food. The best method of getting rid of them is to remove and dispose of all affected food. Clean the cupboard by using a dry cloth, or by vacuuming. Empty the contents into an external dustbin. Make sure the cupboard is completely dry before replacing any foods. This may be achieved by using a warm air blower like a hair dryer.

If you are worried about the presence of psocids in your kitchen and would like to talk to somebody about it, contact the Environmental Health Department. They will be able to offer free, practical advice.

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