

Hit Rebar Drilling Into Concrete — Symptom, What It Is & What to Do

Hit something drilling concrete — symptom, what it is, and what to do

SYMPTOM	WHAT IT IS	WHAT TO DO
Abrupt stop, bit spins/squeals	Rebar (steel)	Move the hole over to clear it
Grey/shiny metal flecks in dust	Rebar (steel)	Relocate, or cut with a rebar cutter
Hard stop that yields slowly	Aggregate (a stone)	Ease off; steady pressure through it
Must drill exactly there	Rebar in the way	Rebar cutter, rotation only (hammer off)
Slab may be post-tensioned	Tensioned cable	Stop – never cut it
Bar might be structural	Load-bearing steel	Stop; ask someone who can assess

How to tell rebar from aggregate: rebar gives an abrupt stop at depth after drilling fine, the bit spins or squeals instead of biting, and grey or shiny metal flecks show in the dust (concrete gives a fine grey-white powder). Hard aggregate (a stone) usually yields with patience and steady pressure; rebar just stops you cold.

The default answer is to MOVE THE HOLE. Rebar is spaced several inches apart in a grid, so shifting the hole an inch or two usually clears the bar and lands in solid concrete - no structural question, no metal-cutting bit, no risk. For most DIY work the position has some give; most readers should stop here.

If you must go through, the two-step method: (1) drill to the bar with a carbide masonry bit and hammer drill; (2) switch to a REBAR CUTTER bit (or a cobalt HSS-Co bit) with HAMMER MODE OFF - rotation only, slow speed, steady pressure, cutting fluid where practical - and cut through the bar; (3) switch back to the masonry bit and hammer mode to finish. The crux: hammer action shatters a metal-cutting bit - concrete gets hammered, steel gets cut by rotation.

A carbide masonry bit will not cut rebar - it is built to pulverise concrete under hammer blows, not to shear steel. A rebar cutter or cobalt (HSS-Co) bit cuts the steel by rotation. Find rebar before you drill with a rebar scanner or a cheap stud/metal detector; it sits at predictable depths and spacings.

SAFETY BOUNDARY: hitting rebar is a stop-and-think moment, not a push-harder one. Whether a given bar is safe to cut is a structural question and an engineer's call, not something to decide from a web page - if the bar might be load-bearing, stop and ask someone who can assess it. NEVER cut a post-tension cable: the steel is under enormous tension and cutting it is dangerous. If you don't know whether a slab is post-tensioned, treat it as if it is.