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## Button Batteries Send Kids To ER

More children are going to the emergency room (ER) with injuries related to batteries, new research finds. A 20-year study found that annual ER visits for this reason nearly doubled between 1990 and 2009. Button batteries were the most common culprit. They accounted for 84% of all ER visits. Most often, batteries were swallowed. But they also were stuck in noses and ears. Button batteries look like small coins. They are found in watches, remote controls, toys, hearing aids, musical greeting cards and games. The study was published in the journal *Pediatrics*. *USA Today* and Reuters wrote about it.

### What Is the Doctor's Reaction?

Parents do their best to make homes safe for children. We use outlet covers. We put baby gates at the tops (and bottoms) of staircases. We check that toys do not have small parts which younger children can choke on.

However, many parents may miss a danger that is used a lot in most of our homes: batteries! Batteries are commonly used in:

Toys

Watches

Hearing aids

Remote controls

Games and other electronic devices

Button batteries, which look like coins, are most common. These can be especially dangerous for children. Button batteries are small and shiny, so children like them.

Children often put button batteries in their mouths. This can cause serious injury when accidentally swallowed. Button batteries easily can lodge in the swallowing tube (called the esophagus) and even cause death.

In a recent study published in *Pediatrics*, researchers looked at the different types of injuries linked with batteries. They used a national sample of data from the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System.

Over the 20-year study period (1990-2009), there were nearly 66,000 emergency room visits by children younger than 18 years old connected with batteries.

Battery-related ER visits were most often due to a child:

Swallowing a battery (77%)

Putting a battery in the nose (10%)

Putting a battery in the mouth (8%)

Putting a battery in the ear (6%)

Researchers also found that some children were more likely than others to be seen in the ER for a battery-related injury:

Boys (60%)

Children younger than 5 years old (75%)

In addition, the study confirmed that button batteries are a big worry. They accounted for 84% of all the battery-related ER visits among children younger than 18 years.

Overall, the number of battery-related ER visits has increased. This trend was noticed most over the last 8 years.

### What changes can I make now?

The results of this study are concerning. More effort must be made to prevent battery-related injury. Parents need to learn more about battery safety.

There are things that parents can do to help protect their children from battery-related injuries:

- Search your home for all things that may have coin-sized button batteries.
- Store devices with these batteries out of sight and out of reach of children.
- Make sure the battery compartments of all electronic items are taped shut.
- Keep unpackaged or "spare" batteries locked away.
- Discard used batteries properly.

Remember that many coin-sized button batteries can be hard to spot. This is really true when devices come with the batteries already installed. Some examples of button batteries often left within the reach of a child are:

- Remote controls
- Bathroom scales
- Musical greeting cards
- Light-up watches, pens and jewelry
- Video games

Battery-related injuries can be prevented! If you ever think your child may have swallowed a button battery, take the following steps:

- Go to the ER **immediately**. Tell the doctors and nurses that your child may have swallowed a battery.
- Provide the doctor with the ID number found on the battery's package.
- Do not let your child eat or drink anything. He may need an X-ray to determine if a battery is present.
- Do **not** try to make your child vomit.

Be sure to follow the above tips. Share them with caregivers, friends, family members and babysitters.

### **What can I expect looking to the future?**

You can expect to hear much more about these dangerous, but preventable injuries. Work is being done to increase awareness about battery-related injury. Battery safety tips can be found on websites, videos, social media channels and more.

Prevention efforts focused particularly on young children will be most important. It is better to prevent exposure to batteries in the first place. Tissue the body can get damaged quickly when exposed to a battery.

In addition, electronics manufacturers are being encouraged to make all battery compartments child resistant. This means designing battery compartments so that a screwdriver or other tool is required to open them.

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