

Button Batteries - A Hidden Hazard for Kids

Child Safety Basics

By [Vincent Iannelli, M.D.](#), About.com Guide Updated March 20, 2012

About.com Health's Disease and Condition content is reviewed by the [Medical Review Board](#)

In addition to being a [choking hazard](#)¹, button batteries are a poisoning risk if they are swallowed, leading to severe burns, especially from lithium batteries.

Button Batteries

Button batteries are small, disc shaped batteries that are often used in small toys, games, remote controls, watches, pen lights, calculators, and hearing aids.

Some unexpected places that you might find a button battery include singing greeting cards, flameless candles, flashing shoes, or your car keys.



Swallowing a button battery is another good reason to call poison control.

Photo courtesy of the CPSC

As more and more products use these small batteries, reports of injuries from young children who unintentionally swallow them are unfortunately increasing.

Hazards of Button Batteries

While some button batteries will quickly pass through a child's intestines and out in his stool, others get stuck and quickly cause tissue damage. This can quickly become a life-threatening situation if it happens in the esophagus, when emergency surgery is often needed to remove the battery.

According to the National Capital Poison Center, there have been at least 16 deaths and 85 cases of severe esophageal or airway burns because of button battery ingestions.

Among the most dangerous button batteries are those that are as big as a penny, such as the 20mm lithium cell, which are often imprinted with the CR2032, CR2025, CR2016 codes.

Button batteries can also cause problems if kids stick them in their nose or ears.

Button Battery Safety Tips

To keep your kids safe from button batteries, it is important to:

- keep button batteries, including used and spare batteries, out of reach of your children
- double check that all products with button batteries, which might include all smaller, powered household products are kept away from younger children and that the battery storage compartment is well secured and requires a screwdriver to open
- avoid changing the batteries in front of small children
- clean out your child's toy chest and get rid of old toys with small batteries that don't work any more
- get rid of old household products with button batteries that you no longer use or that don't work any more
- consider that your child may have swallowed a button battery if your child is choking or has trouble swallowing, as most ingestions are unwitnessed

It is also important to know the number to the [National Battery Ingestion Hotline](#)² (202-625-3333) if you have a question about button batteries, although you can also call your local poison control center for help (1-800-222-1222).

Remember that a button battery ingestion is a medical emergency and you should seek immediate medical attention for your child.

Sources:

CPSC Warns: As Button Battery Use Increases, So Do Battery-Related Injuries and Deaths Toddlers and Seniors Most Often Injured in Battery-Swallowing Incidents. <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prere/phtml11/111181.html>³ Accessed March 2012.

Litovitz, Toby MD. Emerging Battery-Ingestion Hazard: Clinical Implications. Pediatrics. Volume 125, Number 6, June 2010

This About.com page has been optimized for print. To view this page in its original form, please visit: <http://pediatrics.about.com/od/hiddendangers/a/Button-Batteries.htm>
©2012 About.com, Inc., a part of [The New York Times Company](#). All rights reserved.

Links in this article:

1. http://pediatrics.about.com/od/safety/a/109_choking.htm
2. <http://www.poison.org/battery/>
3. <http://www.cpsc.gov/cpscpub/prerele/prhtml11/11181.html>