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Common Batteries Pose Danger for Kids

BY [CHOA](#) ON JANUARY 3, 2013 IN [DEVELOPMENT](#), [NEW PARENTS](#), [PARENTING](#), [PREVENTATIVE HEALTH](#), [SAFETY](#)



By [Jay Hochman, M.D.](#), Pediatric Gastroenterologist

As a pediatric gastroenterologist, I have seen the dangers button batteries pose for infants and children. If swallowed, a button battery can get lodged in the esophagus (throat) where saliva triggers the electrical current causing a chemical reaction. In less than two hours, it can cause a severe burn, which often requires a complicated series of surgeries and time in an intensive care unit (ICU).

These batteries, made of lithium, are much more powerful than alkaline batteries. About the size of a coin (or smaller), they can easily make it into a mouth, nose or ear. It is when one of these lithium batteries gets “stuck” in the body—not moving through a digestive tract—that it most often causes [serious complications](#). According to [a recent study](#), more than 5,500 emergency room visits in the U.S. were due to these ingestions—twice as

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frequent as 20 years ago.

The statistics and potential complications are scary, but there is a lot each of us can do to help prevent our children from getting hurt.

Safety Checklist:

- **Investigate small electronics** (cameras, watches, computers) for button batteries. Get on your hands and knees and crawl—a bathroom scale is one example you may not think of that is kid-accessible.
- Keep items with button batteries in them out of reach and **take extra preventative measures**, such as duct taping the back of the TV remote control.
- **Remove musical greeting cards from your child's reach.** They are not toys—the battery can be ripped out of the paper in seconds.
- **Read the age and warning labels** on toys and electronics. All infant and children's toys should have safety doors that require a screwdriver to change batteries. Toys geared toward adults do not have the same regulations.
- **Dispose of batteries properly.** Visit Earth911.com or call 1-800-CLEANUP to find the nearest facility. Keep them in a child proof medicine bottle until you can get them safely out of the house.



X-ray of a child who swallowed a button battery.

If you think your child has swallowed a lithium button battery (or lodged it in the nose or ear), call the National Battery Ingestion Hotline at 202-625-3333 and go to an emergency room immediately. In most cases, an x-ray will show if the swallowed object is a battery and if it is stuck in the esophagus or in a safer location like the stomach (where it is not considered an emergency). Do not induce vomiting or let your child eat or drink—he needs an empty stomach if surgery and anesthesia are required.

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Dr. Hochman is Chief of Pediatric Gastroenterology at Scottish Rite.

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X-ray marks the spot: When a child swallows a button battery--which are found in household items like watches, scales and musical greeting cards--it can wreck havoc on his or her digestive tract. <http://bit.ly/VxUfFR>



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