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# Tiny Batteries Can Be Inhaled, Docs Warn

Jul 16, 2012 | 4:00 PM ET | Karen Rowan, MyHealthNewsDaily Managing Editor

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batteries are known to be hazardous because young children can swallow them, but the batteries also are small enough to be accidentally inhaled, according to doctors reporting the case of a 4-year-old boy in California.

A disk battery was lodged in the boy's airway for six days before the child's ailment was accurately diagnosed and the battery was removed by surgery, according to researchers at Loma Linda University Medical Center. Eventually he fully recovered.

The case serves as a reminder that [children with symptoms of pulmonary disease](#) may have inhaled an object, the researchers write in their report of the case, which was published today (July 16) in the journal Archives of Otolaryngology — Head & Neck Surgery.

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Additionally, objects that appear on X-rays to be coin-shaped foreign bodies may in fact be disk batteries, which are also called button batteries, the researchers said.

When the boy was brought to the emergency room with high fever and vomiting, it was assumed he had a viral infection. He returned two days later with a [cough and shortness of breath](#), and a chest X-ray was taken. Even then, doctors thought he had pneumonia and treated him with antibiotics, according to the report.

Two days after that, signs of the battery were discovered in one of the chest X-rays, and the boy was underwent surgery.

The surgeons removed a corroded 8 mm battery from the boy's right bronchus. (The bronchi are the airways that connect the trachea, or windpipe, to each lung.) But by then his airway had become constricted, and additional procedures were needed to open it.

The researchers said two previous cases of inhaling these batteries had been reported, and in each case the person recovered.

Most of the objects that children inhale are foods or other items that a child is holding in his or her mouth, the researchers said.

The unpleasant feeling or taste of a battery in the mouth might lead other children to spit them out or swallow them promptly. Incidents of people ingesting disk batteries have increased in recent decades as they have become more common in [small, portable electronic devices](#), the researchers noted. The batteries are commonly found in hearing aids, watches, games or toys and calculators.

Swallowing a small battery rarely causes complications — most pass through the gastrointestinal tract and out of the body, according to the study. However, larger batteries that become lodged can destroy tissue quickly.

In 2007, U.S. [Poison Control Centers](#) reported 476 incidences of disk battery exposure, 9 percent of them leading to moderate to major illness and 59 percent with no associated illnesses, according to the study. No deaths were reported.

One death was reported in 1977, and another in 1992, as a result of complications after a battery was swallowed, according to the study.


**Pass it on:** Disk batteries, also known as button batteries, can be accidentally inhaled by a child who has put one in his or her mouth.

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