

It took docs five months to discover a battery in our son's throat

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DOCTORS say a toddler is lucky to be alive after spending five months with a button battery lodged in his gullet.

Scott Robertson's oesophagus was almost completely closed off with scar tissue by the time surgeons performed a risky operation to remove the battery.

The 18-month-old was throwing up all his meals and eventually even liquids due to the major blockage, which caused his weight to plummet.

His parents, John Robertson, 35 and Elaine Cassidy, 36, are now considering legal action against the health board because of the time taken to diagnose the problem, which was identified with a simple X-ray months after his first symptoms.

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde has apologised to the couple.

Scott had to be transferred to Great Ormond Street hospital in London because there was no surgeon with the expertise to operate in Glasgow.

Doctors said it was lucky that the battery was dead otherwise it could have killed him within hours.

Used to power toys and gadgets, lithium or 'button' batteries can prompt a potentially lethal chemical reaction if swallowed.

Scott's dad John Robertson said: "For five months we were taking him back and forward to GPs and Yorkhill.

"The surgeon at Great Ormond Street said he had been medically neglected and we were very lucky to have him."

John and Elaine became concerned about Scott, who is almost two, in October of 2015.

The couple, who live in Dennistoun, had taken him to accident and emergency at Yorkhill hospital after he suffered a burn on his arm after accidentally tipping over a cup of tea.

Despite treatment for the burn which wasn't giving doctors any cause for concern, his condition deteriorated. He developed a fever and was throwing up his dinner.

John said: "I thought it was probably because he had just had an operation. But days later he was still bringing it back up.

"We took him to the GP and he said he's probably got thrush in his mouth caused by the antibiotics and gave us stuff to treat that.

"The thrush went but there was still the same problem, a week later so we took him back again.

"The doctors thought he might still have thrush in his windpipe and he gave us more medicine. A week later there was still no change."

The couple, who have four other children, took Scott back to the doctor and he was referred to a paediatrician at Yorkhill. However, as time passed and the little boy continued to have problems eating, they took him back to A&E with the referral letter.

John said: "He was living on soup and custard.

"They checked him over and said there was nothing they could do until he was seen by a paediatrician. We were still taking him back and forward to the GP.

"A health visitor thought it might psychological, she said he might looking for attention.

“It got to January and we saw the paediatrician. She said he looked absolutely fine and couldn’t see anything at the back of his throat. She referred him to an ear nose and throat clinic.

“We were now into February.

“I then took him to a locum GP and he said if he had had seen a child who was eating one day and not the next it would automatically set alarms bells off.

“He said we needed to get him into hospital for an X-ray.”

By this time Scott’s weight had plummeted from 11.2kilos to 10 and it had got to the point where he couldn’t hold down liquid, was sleeping constantly and his pallor was”chalk white.”

An ear nose and throat specialist put a scope down and said his airways looked clear but arranged an X-ray for the following week where they discovered the lodged button battery.

Button batteries if swallowed can set up an electrical current which causes a build-up of sodium hydroxide which is caustic soda. This causes a burn through the oesophagus and that can then burn through into major blood vessels causing catastrophic bleeding.

In 2014, two children died in the Manchester area after swallowing button batteries. Glasgow’s health board issued a warning to parents ahead of the festive season.

Elaine said: “We were told we were very lucky that it was a dead battery.”

John, said: “We immediately started blaming ourselves but you can’t watch children 24/7.

“The plan was to get the op done that day but they then told us he would have to referred to Great Ormond Street. It was pressing on his airway and they thought they might have to rebuild his trachea.

“The only place that has specialists for that is Great Ormond Street so we all went down.

“The surgeon went down with a scope to try to get it but when they went down, they said it was just black. Scar tissue had completely covered his oesophagus. That’s why he couldn’t eat or drink.

“They had to go in through the right side, cut away 4cm of his oesophagus and then re-join in.

“They said it could have turned into a life-threatening operation.

“He was in intensive care for five days on a ventilator. It was really scary.”

“The surgeon, Joseph Currie said he had been medically neglected and we were very lucky to have him.”

Although Scott is now doing well and meeting his milestones, he has to have surgery every four or five weeks to dilate his oesophagus and there is a risk it will continue to narrow into adulthood.

John said: “Mr Currie told us to take it further. He said, if it had been caught earlier, it would have just been a case of going down with periscope tweezers.”

A spokeswoman for NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said: “We would like to apologise to Scott and his parents for the time taken to diagnose his condition.

“It is very difficult to diagnose button battery ingestion, if this has not been witnessed at the time.

“In December we sent out a warning to parents to make them aware of the potential dangers button batteries pose to children. If Scott’s parents wish, we would be more than happy to meet them to discuss his care.”