

Coin Batteries Hidden Danger To Kids

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Kids may swallow the coin, or button, battery inside the greeting card.

Safe Kids USA says that in 2010 alone, more than 3400 children in the U.S. swallowed small batteries and needed emergency medical care.

“When a child swallows an object like a coin or peanut and it lodges in the throat, you need to get medical help as soon as possible. But when it’s a button battery, there’s no time to waste. It’s an emergency,” said Dr. Elizabeth Sisk, UW Health ear, nose and throat specialist.

Coin batteries can lodge in the esophagus, the swallowing passage, and release electrical discharge-causing burns, leak alkali leading to deeper tissue damage and release toxic heavy metals such as lithium. Severe damage can occur in as little as two hours. Sisk said these substances can quickly burn a hole in the esophagus and damage the trachea, causing difficulty breathing and a life-threatening emergency.

Sisk said if it's caught early, the damage can heal with minimal scarring. In more extreme cases, children need a feeding tube for several weeks and may need surgical intervention or repair.

Small batteries are found in most households in remote controls, hearing aids and other battery-powered devices. But they are also found in musical greeting cards and light up children's shoes, apparel and toys. Sisk said since the batteries are very small and often accessible, it might not be obvious when children swallow them. Symptoms include inability to swallow and excessive drooling. Sisk advises parents, grandparents and child-care providers to act quickly if a child can't swallow and drools excessively, or when any foreign body ingestion is suspected.

There are ways to prevent injuries. "While you're child-proofing, look for any devices and any battery-operated toys or other kids' items that might have button batteries and make sure they're out of reach. Many toys require a screwdriver to open the battery compartment, but be especially mindful of cards, accessories or small toys where batteries are easily accessible," said Sisk.

Media Inquiries news@uwhealth.org

University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority

Child health



About Gady Goldsobel