

# Toddler's ordeal highlights button battery danger

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Image 1 of 4

ATLANTA - Rodney Beard is a DeKalb County Fire Rescue Captain, earning his stripes as a single dad to 14-month old RJ.

His wife passed away when RJ was 6 months old, so his mother is helping him take care of RJ.

"I've been a fireman for over 20 years, keeping up with a 1-year old is much harder," Beard says.

Because RJ, like most toddlers, is constantly putting things in his mouth.

"He wants to taste it, see how it feels, and you have to tell him, 'No, get that out of your mouth,'" Beard says.

This Spring, R-J, an easy baby, grew irritable, especially at mealtime.

"When he would chew his food and swallow it, a few minutes later, he would vomit it back up," Beard says.

Beard took him to see a pediatrician, who, at first, found nothing out of the ordinary.

"She says, 'I want to do one more thing, Beard remembers. "'Let's get an x-ray and make sure he didn't swallow anything.'"

That's when they saw it: a nickel-sized lithium button battery, lodged in RJ's esophagus.

Dr. Cary Sauer, Children's Healthcare of Atlanta's Director of Endoscopy, says RJ was in serious danger.

He says lithium batteries emit a powerful electrical charge, that in as little as 2 hours, can burn through the wall of a child's esophagus, into the nearby aorta, the largest blood vessel in the body.

"So the very first thing is getting that button battery out as soon as possible," Dr. Sauer says.

That procedure took just 15 minutes.

But RJ's ordeal was just beginning.

"My son had swelling throughout his thoracic cavity," Rodney Beard says. "He was at risk for bleeding, for ruptures."

RJ landed in the Children's pediatric ICU, monitored around the clock for serious complications.

In the hospital, the Beards met two other families, whose children had also swallowed button batteries the very same week.

But where did they get them?

Most of the time, Dr. Sauer says, parents can't answer that question.

"I do not know where the battery came from, but he found it, and he wanted to try it out," Rodney Beard says.

The batteries are sold in childproof packaging, with warning stickers that they're a swallowing hazard for infants.

Dr. Sauer says kids typically find button batteries in toys and musical greeting cards, where they're often glued or taped into the back of the card.

"If you have a musical card, let the kids play with it while you're there, and then that night, or that next night, pull out that button battery and dispose of it," Sauer says.

If you suspect your child may have swallowed a button battery, he says, get to an emergency room as soon as possible.

RJ Beard underwent multiple scans to track the damage done by the battery.

Sauer says complications are possible even weeks after a child ingests one of these batteries.

After nearly a month at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, RJ finally appears to be out of the woods.

"He's getting better, thank God, each day," Rodney Beard says.

He can finally exhale.

His little explorer is going to be okay.

"I refer to him now as "lithium baby," Beard laughs.