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Lithium Cell Batteries: a real hazard

Posted by [Karen](#) on 6/01/10 • Categorized as [Baby](#), [Kids](#), [Medical](#), [Pregnancy](#), [Preschooler](#), [Toddler](#)

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Lithium Button Cell Batteries

At the beginning of parenthood there is nothing more challenging than policing everything that goes in your child's mouth. There are hazards everywhere: coins, game pieces, paperclips and now, an increasingly serious danger according to a [recent article](#) in the NY Times: [lithium cell batteries](#).

You can find small disc-like lithium batteries in just about everything now: cameras, scales, watches and yes, toys. Just like coins, the round smooth shape of the lithium button batteries is appealing to children. And, just like coins, they are being swallowed by children.

According to [Wikipedia](#), lithium cells can produce voltages from 1.5 V to about 3.7 V, over twice the voltage of an ordinary [zinc-carbon battery](#) or [alkaline cell](#) battery.

[The NY Time article reported](#) that "About 3,500 cases of button cell battery ingestion are reported annually to poison control centers. But while swallowing batteries has occurred for years, the development of larger, stronger lithium cell batteries has increased the risk of severe complications. Data from the National Capital Poison Center in Washington found a sevenfold increase in severe complications from button cell ingestions in recent years. Moderate to severe cases have risen from less than a half percent (about a dozen cases per year) to about 3 percent (nearly 100 cases per year), based on a review of 56,000 cases since 1985."

[The NY Time article states that](#) "among the serious complications, the chemical reaction triggered by the batteries can damage vocal cords, leaving children with a lifelong whisper. Damage to the gastrointestinal tract means some children require feeding tubes and multiple surgeries. "The injuries are so much more serious," said Dr. Toby Litovitz, director and lead author of both articles in [Pediatrics](#). 'It's like drain opener or lye. It's not something you want in the esophagus of your child.' The batteries that pose the greatest risk are those that begin with the number 20, which stands for 20 millimeters. They are newer and stronger than older models. Batteries numbered 2032, 2025 and 2016 are responsible for more than 90 percent of serious injuries."

I noticed last week that my standing scale had one of these lithium button batteries and only a flimsy backing to keep it in place. I only became aware of it because my 20 month old was carrying the

scale around and the battery looked like it was being jostled out of its place. She noticed it too and tried to take the battery out before I swiped the scale from her hands. As the [NY Time article](#) points out, “When children ingest batteries, it’s usually not because they found one loose in the home. In 60 percent of the cases involving children under age 6, the child has removed the battery from the electronic device. The problem is that most parents are not even aware when it happens, yet studies show the battery begins to cause severe damage within just two hours of ingestion.”

It’s worth considering baby-proofing for these batteries and helping other parents become aware of their potential danger too.

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