

Swallowing disc batteries is a bad idea -- and so is delaying treatment, study says

 latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2010-sep-19-la-heb-battery-20100920-story.html

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Los Angeles Times

Note to pediatricians: Swallowed batteries damage children's insides alarmingly fast and need to be treated as quickly as possible, say the authors of a study in the September issue of the Archives of Otolaryngology -- Head & Neck Surgery.

Though batteries should not be part of your child's food pyramid, they're increasingly becoming an issue in our high-tech environment, as Melissa Healy previously pointed out in a blog post on lithium batteries.

Disc batteries, easily gobbled by a curious toddler, can cause those children to choke. Even worse, the alkaline in the power cells can destroy tissue, and small-voltage electrical shocks can cause internal burns.

The researchers, led by Stanley Kimball of Mount Carmel Health System in Columbus, Ohio, looked at the cases of 10 children (average age: 3.2 years) who swallowed batteries and had to have them removed through esophagoscopy.

Even though two of the children whose injuries the authors reviewed were treated within three hours of having swallowed the alkaline-leaking capsules, they still sustained serious damage to the tissue of the esophagus. "Our study confirms that esophageal injury can progress very quickly in children following ingestion of a disc battery," the authors wrote.

But the researchers found a surprising trend among doctors: They described another study showing that more than a third of physicians surveyed weren't concerned about a swallowed battery. That wasn't the worst of it, apparently ... "Twenty-two percent would not remove [batteries] even if they were lodged in the esophagus," they wrote.

In their paper, the authors present a protocol in a tree-format to help guide doctors in deciding how to deal with a swallowed battery. Perhaps most important: As soon as the battery is identified using chest radiography, the authors concluded, "emergency esophagoscopy is mandated." For those of you at home, here's what to do in the event you (or someone you know) swallows a battery, courtesy of the National Capital Poison Center.

-- Amina Khan / Los Angeles Times

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