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Hearing Aid Battery Precautions for Audiologists

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by Pam Mason

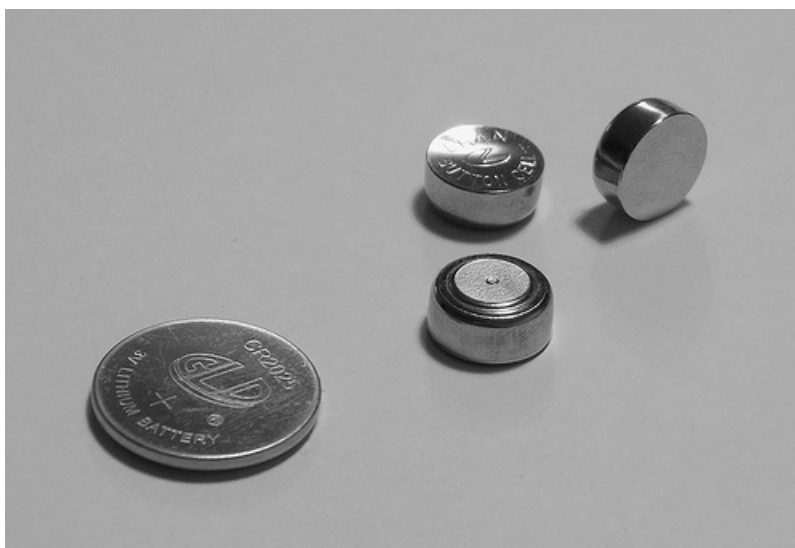


Photo by James Bowe

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) published an article in the [June issue of *Pediatrics*](#) on the significant increase in pediatric button battery ingestion and resulting serious complications.

The button batteries of greatest concern are the batteries containing lithium. Batteries with lithium can cause severe burns and even death if swallowed. Lithium batteries are often found in remote controls, cameras and other household electronic devices. Two studies highlighted in the article report devastating injuries such as destruction of the wall of the esophagus and trachea and vocal paralysis. Ingested batteries need to be removed within two hours to prevent these medical emergencies.

While hearing aid batteries do not contain lithium, precautions still need to be taken to prevent accidental ingestion. Audiologists should be educating patients and families on battery safety. I remember my grandmother telling me (before I was an audiologist) that she had lined up all her morning pills to take with breakfast and had also lined up a hearing aid battery to remind her to replace the one in her hearing aid. She popped the battery into her mouth along with her medications and swallowed! As an RN she was aware of possible irritation and danger and carefully monitored her digestive system over the next few days. Apparently the battery passed safely through her gastrointestinal tract with no negative effects! This is what happens most of the time when a hearing aid battery is accidentally ingested; however, even zinc-air batteries contain trace amounts of the heavy metal mercury.

Poisoning is possible after ingestion if the battery disintegrates and the casing opens.

Beginning in July 2011, some states began requiring all hearing aid batteries to be mercury-free. Mercury is considered an environmental hazard and toxic to our environment when it ends up in a landfill. Check with your state for current regulations and look for batteries that have no mercury.

Along with your hearing aid orientation and battery instructions, here are some additional tips to share with your patients:

- Seek medical attention right away if a battery has been ingested. Children and pets may exhibit these symptoms: anorexia, nausea, vomiting and very dark stools.
- Do not dispose of batteries in a fire...they can explode and release toxins.
- Recycle batteries (Do you as an audiologist have this value-added feature in your practice? If not, Radio Shack will recycle batteries.)
- Make sure that hearing aids for children are fitted with locking battery doors and activate the locking mechanism at all times when the child is wearing the devices.
- Alert other family members to secure batteries out of reach of small children.
- Don't mistake the battery for a pill!
- National Battery Ingestion Hotline: 202-625-3333.
- Batteries in the nose and ear must also be removed quickly and safely to avoid permanent damage.

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