

Dangers of children swallowing small magnets and batteries

Posted Jun 23, 2012 by [Leigh Goessl](#)

A recent letter published by doctors in The Lancet highlights the dangers associated with ingestion of magnets. The doctors are warning parents to take extra care their children do not accidentally swallow them.

According to [Medical News Daily](#), Dr. Anil Thomas George and Dr. Sandeep Motiwale of Queen's Medical Center, part of Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, in the United Kingdom, note two separate cases of children needing surgical intervention after they'd swallowed magnets that became lodged in their systems.

In each case, the child had ingested a magnet that came from children's toys. One incident involved an 18-month-old baby ingesting 10 small magnetic balls. The other case was an 8-year-old child that swallowed 2-cm long magnetic strips.

Toys are not the only problem, doctors warn many adult items contain small magnets or batteries as well.

Often magnets can safely pass through a child's system, but large magnets, or several smaller ones, can link together and cause an obstruction, or create a [fistula](#), said the doctors.

Dr. George said, "We are particularly concerned about the widespread availability of cheap magnetic toys where the magnetic parts could become easily detached. Parents should be warned of the risk of magnet ingestion, particularly in small children. We believe that improvement in public awareness about this risk will be key in preventing such incidents."

Ingestion of batteries is also a growing issue. In a [separate warning](#), Union County Safe Kids Program at Children's Specialized Hospital, notes the problems associated with swallowing small batteries.

In 2010, the issue of swallowed button batteries was [highlighted as a growing problem](#) in the U.S.

As toys are increasingly made with both magnetic and battery-operated features, the risks of children accidentally eating them has risen. And despite the warnings two years ago, it seems the problem has not subsided.

"The popularity of these products are growing, and it's resulting in an increasing amount of incidents," Kim Dulic, a spokesperson for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), told [ABC News](#)



U.S. Government Consumer Product Safety Commission

Magnetix toy with broken magnets from Rose Art Industries Inc., of Livingston, N.J.

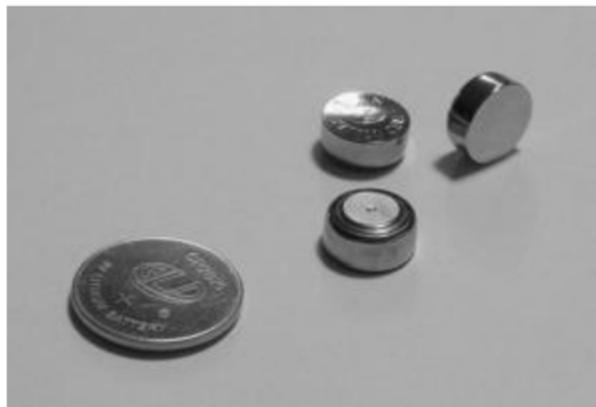
recently.

"The difference between magnets and these batteries is that you can see symptoms within two hours of swallowing them," said Dulic. "It burns the esophagus and it can start soon after."

ABC News also reported CPSC said teens are also at an increased risk due to magnetic tongue rings and lip piercings.

"While we understand that it may be impossible to prevent small children from occasionally swallowing objects, we would highlight to parents the potential harm that could arise from multiple magnet ingestion," George said in a statement. "We would advise parents to be more vigilant and take extra care when giving their children toys that may contain magnets small enough to swallow."

"We would also welcome an increased awareness of this problem among toy manufacturers, who have a responsibility to alert parents to the presence of magnets in their products," Dr. George said.



James Bowe

Button batteries