Anybody who is or has been a parent knows that when it comes to babies and toddlers, there is little that they won’t put in their mouths. Our increasingly minaturized world means there are more opportunities for disaster. That’s why a recent federal report should be required reading for new parents.

Those button batteries, the ones that power watches, toys remote controls and other electronic devices, are more prevalent than ever. That means there’s been more cases of kids swallowing them. The batteries often get stuck in the tot’s esophagus and can begin causing serious burns within two hours, it says. A handful of kids have died.

From 1997-2010, an estimated 40,400 kids were treated in emergency departments after having swallowed batteries, the report said, adding that the rate of cases is rising at a statistically significant rate. It can be difficult to know when a child has swallowed a battery. According to the CDC, symptoms of battery swallowing include vomiting, abdominal pain, fever, diarrhea, respiratory distress, and dysphagia, or difficulty with swallowing. Serious complications and death were associated most frequently with 3-volt lithium, coin-size batteries around 20 millimeters in diameter, it said.

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission says it is asking the electronics industry and battery manufacturers to develop warnings and industry standards to address this issue.

The commission has these recommendations to prevent unintentional battery ingestion:
- Discard button batteries carefully.
- Do not allow children to play with button batteries, and keep button batteries out of your child's reach.
- Caution hearing aid users to keep hearing aids and batteries out of the reach of children.
- Never put button batteries in your mouth for any reason as they are easily swallowed accidentally.
- Always check medications before ingesting them. Adults have swallowed button batteries mistaken for pills or tablets.
- Keep remote and electronic devices out of your child's reach if the battery compartments do not have a screw to secure them. Use tape to help secure the battery compartment.
- If a button battery is ingested, immediately seek medical attention. The National Battery Ingestion Hotline is available anytime at (202) 625-3333 (call collect if necessary), or call your poison center at (800) 222-1222.
heart disease in the Lehigh Valley. She loves fitness walks with her dog Ranger. And she likes to think her younger son inherited his interest in health from her. He's a cardiologist practicing in the Valley.

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