

Family almost loses son because of a button battery

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COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. — Beckett Goss is an energetic 7-year-old.

“He’s my only boy and we do everything together. He’s a baseball player, he’s a basketball player, he loves to run and play and build things,” said Brandon Goss, his father.

But three years ago, his family was faced with the reality that they could lose their special little guy.

“You’re just sitting there one Sunday afternoon having a great time chatting with family, and then all of the sudden you’re facing the death of your son,” said Tina Goss, Beckett’s mother.

Though he was only 4 at the time, Beckett still remembers that day.

“We were at our Nana’s house and we were watching the Broncos game and I went behind the chair and I put something shiny on my tongue and then it shocked me so I swallowed,” he said.

That something shiny was a button battery, and his parents had no idea they only had a few hours to get it removed.

“All of the sudden Beckett came upstairs just kind of grabbing at his chest saying that his belly was really hurting,” said Brandon.

“We were just concerned that maybe something was stuck in his throat and so instantly we just thought, well, we’ll just give him some water and maybe he’ll feel better, but as soon as he swallowed that water it was just extreme pain,” said Tina.

Brandon and Tina rushed Beckett to an urgent care facility, thinking maybe he had swallowed a magnet. Luckily, the doctor there quickly realized otherwise.

“That’s when he kind of sat us down and said, ‘You just need to be ready. Button batteries are very serious,’” said Brandon. “And so he says at any moment he could just start coughing up blood and bleed out and die.”

“The current of the battery causes a reaction in the salt and the water and the saliva and you end up with sodium hydroxide, and then that causes a severe chemical burn,” said Dr. David P. Bliss, a pediatric surgeon with Children’s Hospital Colorado.

“If a button battery sits in your esophagus, the injury can begin as quickly as 30 minutes and within hours it can have burned all the way through your esophagus,” said Dr. Christine Waasdorp Hurtado, a gastroenterology specialist with Children’s Hospital Colorado.

Doctors said there’s only about a two-hour window before serious damage occurs, and if the battery has time to burn through the esophagus and back towards the heart, the child can bleed to death within seconds.

“It gets very dangerous, very quick,” said Bliss. “The tissue just falls apart and then you can have just sudden bleeding and death. So those are rare cases, but we’ve all see it and it’s just very scary.”

Scary for everyone, but especially the parents. Beckett was taken to Memorial Hospital and was nearing the two-hour mark when a miracle happened.

“They were about to do surgery and then my mom and dad said ‘first can we have a couple of seconds?,’ and then we went to the back room and said a prayer and a blessing, and then right when they started to wheel me up I shot up and threw it up and it landed right in the middle of my chest and then everyone started clapping and stuff,” said Beckett.

Brandon and Tina thought their nightmare was over, but the doctor said they still needed to do a scope, and later returned with more bad news.

“The doctor comes in with just this very somber face on and she said there was quite a bit of burns, two ulcers on his esophagus,” said Tina.

Beckett was taken to Children’s Hospital in Denver and monitored for five days.

“We have seen death up to 18 days after injury, so we really follow them very closely for at least a month, partially inpatient, partially outpatient, to make sure that they are safe,” said Waasdorp Hurtado.

Eventually, Beckett was sent home and quickly returned to his spunky self—something his parents are thankful for every day.

“He might not have been a part of our family anymore and I know we’re so blessed that we had such an optimum outcome because so many things could have gone wrong,” said Tina. “And he enjoys such a great life and we’re just so blessed that that’s how our story ended.”

But that’s now how all stories end.

In 2015, there were more than 3,200 button battery ingestions reported nationwide, leading to more than 300 injuries and five fatalities, one of which was in Colorado. There were also two hospitalizations that year in Colorado Springs for ingestion.

In 2016, Children's Hospital Colorado saw 17 patients who ingested a button battery, a 70 percent increase from the year before.

So far, in just the first three months of 2017, there have already been two ingestions. Luckily, both of those patients survived.

Doctors expect the problem to only get worse as the prevalence of button batteries increases.

"If you walk through your house, guaranteed you will find a handful of them," said Waasdorp Hurtado.

"Frequently they're found in greeting cards, key fobs, toys of the kids, even in their shoes," said Laura Kent, SafeKids Coalition Coordinator.

Not only are button batteries becoming more common, but they're also becoming stronger.

Symptoms of a battery ingestion are hard to decipher, especially in younger children who can't speak, who unfortunately are at the most risk.

"If parents have a child who is fussy and they don't understand why, if they're not tolerating their secretion, so if they're drooling more than they anticipate, that they can't explain with teething or respiratory infection, if a child is having any eating problems, those are all reasons to go and seek evaluation," said Waasdorp Hurtado.

Doctors recommend parents take their child to an emergency room instead of an urgent care, because there is no time for transfers or delays.

"If there's any question at all, they need to come right to the emergency room, because you need a chest x-ray. You need a front and a side x-ray to see what you have," said Bliss.

"Number one, what is it? And two, is it a penny or a battery? And if it's a battery, then we really have to jump right on it."

In a house full of potentially dangerous items, experts say securing button batteries should be at the top of the list.

"I think it needs to be the number one priority," said Waasdorp Hurtado.

"The awareness isn't what I'd like to see and it didn't used to be a problem, it really didn't," said Bliss.

“You can have them in your home and have no idea that they’re dangerous because they aren’t labeled currently,” said Waasdorp Hurtado.

Children’s Hospital Colorado is working to better educate the medical community and parents whenever they can.

“Children’s Hospital Colorado has been working very strongly within our system, along with in the communities, to educate all providers that this is a big deal, from the check-in desk to the providers who are caring for the children,” said Waasdorp Hurtado.

“I can’t emphasize the time factor enough and that’s actually not appreciated among a lot of physicians either. Two hours is the key,” said Bliss. “So if you’re lucky that’s great, but typically you’re already behind.”

Bliss said if there’s any question about what the child swallowed, parents should ask for an x-ray from both the front and the side and push for answers.