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Button batteries

Button batteries are tiny, round batteries. They are commonly used in watches and hearing aids. Children often swallow these batteries or put them up their nose. They can be breathed in more deeply (inhaled) from the nose.

This article is for information only. DO NOT use it to treat or manage an actual poison exposure. If you or someone you are with has an exposure, call your local emergency number (such as 911), or your local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States.

Also, you can call the National Button Battery Ingestion Hotline (800-498-8666).

Where Found

These devices use button batteries:

- Calculators
- Cameras
- Hearing aids
- Penlights
- Watches

Symptoms

If a person puts the battery up their nose and breathes it further in, these symptoms may occur:

- Breathing problems
- Cough
- Pneumonia (if the battery goes unnoticed)
- Possible complete blockage of the airway
- Wheezing

A swallowed battery may cause no symptoms at all. But if it becomes stuck in the food pipe (esophagus) or stomach, these symptoms may occur:

- Abdominal pain

- Bloody stools
- Cardiovascular collapse (shock)
- Chest pain
- Drooling
- Nausea or vomiting (possibly bloody)
- Metallic taste in the mouth
- Painful or difficult swallowing

Home Care

Seek medical help right away. Do not make the person throw up unless poison control or a health care provider tells you to.

Before Calling Emergency

Have this information ready:

- Person's age, weight, and condition
- Name of the battery
- Time the battery was swallowed
- Size of the swallowed battery

Poison Control

Your local poison control center can be reached directly by calling the national toll-free Poison Help hotline (1-800-222-1222) from anywhere in the United States. This national hotline will let you talk to experts in poisoning. They will give you further instructions.

This is a free and confidential service. All local poison control centers in the United States use this national number. You should call if you have any questions about poisoning or poison prevention. It does NOT need to be an emergency. You can call for any reason, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Also, you can call the National Button Battery Ingestion Hotline (800-498-8666).

What to Expect at the Emergency Room

The provider will measure and monitor the person's vital signs, including temperature, pulse, breathing rate, and blood pressure. Symptoms will be treated.

The person may receive:

- X-rays to locate the batteries
- Bronchoscopy -- camera placed down the throat into the lungs to remove the battery if it is in the windpipe or lungs
- Direct laryngoscopy -- (a procedure to look into the voice box and vocal cords) or surgery right away if the battery was breathed in and is causing a life-threatening airway blockage
- Endoscopy -- camera to remove the battery if it was swallowed and is still in the esophagus or stomach

- Fluids by vein (intravenous)
- Medicines to treat symptoms
- Blood and urine tests

If the battery has passed through the stomach into the small intestine, the usual treatment is to do another x-ray in 1 to 2 days to make sure the battery is moving through the intestines.

The battery should continue to be followed with x-rays until it passes in the stool. If nausea, vomiting, fever, or abdominal pain develop, it may mean that the battery has caused a blockage of the intestines. If this happens, surgery may be needed to remove the battery and reverse the blockage.

Outlook (Prognosis)

Most swallowed batteries pass through the stomach and intestines without causing any serious damage.

How well someone does depends on the type of battery they swallowed and how quickly they receive treatment. The faster medical help is given, the better the chance for recovery.

Burns in the esophagus and stomach may result in ulcers and fluid leakage. This can lead to serious infection and possibly surgery. Complications become more likely the longer the battery is in contact with internal structures.

Alternative Names

Swallowing batteries

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