

FACTSHEET



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Button batteries

What is a button battery?

A button battery is a small single cell flat battery, shaped like a button. Button batteries can vary in size, from 0.5cm to 2.5cm in width. Sometimes they are called 'coin' or lithium batteries.

All button batteries are dangerous but the most common size to cause severe damage is the 'coin' battery. A 'coin' battery is the size of a 10 cent piece (2cm wide).



Where are button batteries used?

Button batteries are commonly used in many different small electrical products and toys. Often they are already installed in the products and toys. Examples include but are not limited to remote controls, watches, calculators, toys, flashing decorations, flameless candles and reading lights.

Are button batteries dangerous?

Swallowing any button battery, old or new, can cause life threatening injuries and even death, especially if it becomes stuck in the oesophagus (food pipe). Batteries which become stuck in the nose or ears can also cause local burns.

When swallowed, the left over electrical current in a button battery reacts with moisture to produce a strong alkali chemical. The chemical can cause serious internal burns and bleeding. The batteries can also leak chemicals which can cause serious burns. The coin shaped batteries are easily caught in the oesophagus, and when stuck can start to cause damage very quickly (within 2 hours).

First aid for swallowed button batteries

- If your child is having any difficulty breathing, call 000 immediately.
- Call the Poisons Information Centre 13 11 26.
- Take your child **immediately** to the nearest Emergency Department for assessment and treatment.
- Do not try to make your child vomit.
- Do not let your child eat or drink while awaiting medical advice.

If you know or just suspect that your child has swallowed a button battery you must act immediately.

There may be no early symptoms.

Who is at risk?

Young children are at most risk of poisoning from button battery ingestion. Young children are curious and like to explore by putting everything in their mouth. This leads to more accidental ingestions.

A toddler's smaller body size also means they are more likely to have a button battery caught in the oesophagus, causing serious damage.

How common are these injuries?

Every day in Australia there is at least one child who needs to go to hospital because of a button battery ingestion.

In 2016, the NSW Poisons Information Centre took 179 calls regarding button battery exposures.

Of those admitted to The Children's Hospital at Westmead (CHW) between 2002 and 2015:

- the majority (67.4%) were 0-4 years.
- the body regions affected among all ages included the bowel (42.9%), oesophagus (30.6%), nose (22.5%) and ear (4.1%).

What are the symptoms of a child who has swallowed a button battery?

Children often swallow button batteries without anyone knowing. Symptoms can include chest pain, coughing, choking, vomiting, drooling, decreased appetite or refusal to eat, fever, abdominal pain and general discomfort. Spitting blood or blood-stained saliva or having very dark stained or black bowel motions, can indicate bleeding or ulceration somewhere in the upper or lower digestive system.

How is a swallowed button battery diagnosed?

Your child may need to have an x-ray of the appropriate area to locate the battery.



Is there a Law or an Australian Standard for button batteries?

The law, Fair Trading Amendment (Children's Toys) Regulation 2010, states that all toys for children 36 months and under in Australia must comply with the Australian Standard (AS/NZS ISO 8124.1:2002). The standard states that toys for children 3 years and younger must have any batteries secured in a compartment by a screw or must need a couple of distinct movements to open the battery compartment. Other devices and toys for children over 3 years of age up to adults, such as thermometers or remote controls do not need special battery closures.

How can you prevent children from swallowing button batteries?

- Keep button batteries and all other batteries in a child resistant locked cupboard that is at least 1.5 metres above ground, out of reach of children.
- Check that all remotes, toys and products containing button batteries have a screw to secure them. If the batteries are not secured in with a screw, keep out of reach of children. You can also secure the battery compartment with strong tape.
- Buy new batteries that are in child resistant packaging ie: the packets need to be opened with scissors.
- Keep spare batteries locked away, out of reach.
- Throw old button batteries away carefully, in an outside bin, out of reach of children.

Remember:

- Call the Poisons Information Centre on **13 11 26** if you suspect a battery has been swallowed.
- Go to the nearest hospital emergency department.
- Keep all button batteries out of reach of children ie; in a child resistant locked cupboard that is at least 1.5metres above the ground.
- Share this information with family and friends.