

Watch out for button batteries

With button batteries back in the headlines, we share advice for families to help keep children safe

The dangers of button batteries have hit the headlines again recently with the heartbreaking news of the death of two-year-old after she swallowed a button battery from a remote control. Her mother has spoken to the media in an effort to warn other parents, saying she wasn't aware of the dangers of button batteries.

Mother of two, Linda*, knows only too well the terror of having your child swallow a button battery – it happened to her son Ben when he was just two years old. Linda spoke to us about her son's experience, to help raise awareness of the dangers of button batteries, which many parents (and even some doctors) are not aware of, and to try and prevent it happening to more children. The incident happened in August 2015.

Linda said: "We'd just moved home – Lucy was four and Ben was two. We were three days into our move and my husband went back to work. It was on this morning that my son came to me with something in his hand. He had hold of a button battery, (we think it may have fallen out of the bathroom scales). I took it off him and put it on the worktop in the kitchen. I didn't realise how dangerous button batteries were."

Linda then briefly turned away to help her daughter who was shouting from the bathroom. When she returned 30 seconds later her son coughed briefly, before crying, writhing in pain and starting to be sick. When she noticed that the battery was missing from the kitchen worktop, she rang her husband who quickly came home from work and then called an ambulance.

After waiting for 45 minutes, the family drove to their hospital themselves where Ben was eventually sent for an X-Ray, which showed the battery lodged in his oesophagus.

He was then sent to Alder Hey Children's Hospital for an operation to remove the battery. The family has since removed all items with batteries out of the reach of their children.

Linda warned parents that they may not realise straight away if a child has swallowed a battery. "When this happened to Ben, his immediate symptoms were coughing, crying and writhing in pain, complaining of back pain and vomiting. However, a couple of hours before he had the battery removed, he was running around and playing in the hospital and you wouldn't believe there was anything wrong with him.

"Please don't think that just because they seem ok, that they are. Get your child straight to hospital even if you're not sure they've swallowed one and insist on an X-ray. Speed is of the essence with button battery ingestion, the sooner your child is treated, the more chance you have to a full recovery."

**All names have been changed.*

Remember:

- Button batteries are dangerous when swallowed (if they get stuck in the throat), or if they get stuck in their nose or ear.
- Lithium batteries are the most dangerous, but all button batteries have the potential to cause damage when swallowed, or when stuck in a child's ear or nose.
- Button batteries can be found in a wide range of objects, including (but not exclusively):
 - small remote controls
 - car key fobs
 - calculators

- thermometers
- hearing aids
- digital scales
- musical cards
- novelty toys
- watches
- flameless candles and nightlights.

- Batteries in children's toys are covered by safety regulations and should be enclosed by a screw and secure. Check regularly to ensure battery enclosures are securely screwed in.

Top tips to keep children safe from button batteries

1. Keep products with batteries well out of reach if the battery compartment isn't secured with a screw.
2. Keep all spare batteries out of children's reach and sight.
3. Avoid toys from markets or temporary shops as they may not conform to safety regulations.
4. Teach older children that button batteries are dangerous and not to play with them or give them to younger brothers and sisters.
5. Remember that even used batteries can be dangerous, so recycle them safely.
6. Most importantly of all, if you think your child may have swallowed a button battery, do not wait for symptoms to appear. Take them to A&E immediately, tell the doctor you think they have swallowed a button battery, do not let your child eat or drink, and don't try to make them sick.

Share this guidance with parents and carers

Find out more

For more advice and tips aimed at parents and families, visit familycorner.co.uk.