

A Penny for Your Thoughts

You discover that your child just swallowed a coin. In this hypothetical case, let's say it was a penny. Pennies contain zinc and copper, but our main concern is mechanical obstruction. What do you do? Well, that depends, but before we get into that, always remember

RULE #1:

Call 911 if the child is hoarse, choking or having difficulty breathing.

Now, back to the original question. If your child is two years old or older, you may be in the clear, but refer to rule #1. If the child ingested a coin penny size (23mm) or smaller, you may be in the clear, but refer to rule #1. However, if your child is below two years old or the coin is larger than a penny, it is recommended that he/she be taken to the ER for an X-ray that will determine the location of the coin. If the coin has reached the stomach or passed through the stomach, generally, the child can be discharged home with the parents watching for the coin to pass. (*Wait a minute, that doesn't sound like fun. See directions for checking stools below.*) If the coin has not passed in 3-4 days, it is best to go back to ER or pediatrician to determine if the coin has become lodged or missed in the feces.

Checking bowel Movements: Bowel movements should be checked for small, smooth objects. Collect your child's bowel movements in a diaper or on newspapers. Cut the bowel movements up with a knife or strain them through a piece of screen until you find the object. Seek medical attention if the foreign body hasn't passed in 3 days.

Watch for symptoms: Take child to ER if abdominal pain, vomiting, or bloody stools develop in the next two weeks.

The Oklahoma Center for Poison and Drug Information is prepared to help you through this process, as long as Rule #1 does not apply. Call 911 immediately if any of the above noted conditions apply. However, if your child is asymptomatic (acting their normal) and has swallowed a coin or any object for that matter, call the Poison Center at **1-800-222-122** and we will walk you through the process to see what, if anything, needs to be done to keep your child safe.

Ken Wiser Pharm. D.

Certified Specialist in Poison Information