

You're a parent who works tirelessly to keep your home free of small debris. Of course you do – you're the parent of a toddler.

Toddlers love to stick small objects in their mouths. As a grown person, you ponder: why on earth would they experiment this way; certainly there are better ways to get your attention; or, could they possibly be hungry or teething?

If “don't put that in your mouth!” is quickly becoming your parental catchphrase, perhaps you want to know why you are saying it and why so often. The fact is, oral exploration is a developmental milestone.

You read that right, your child is learning. They are categorizing tastes and textures. Click [here](#) to learn more.

I like to think back to about 100 years ago, before households became full of cleaning supplies and plastic toys. If all you had in your house was organic things (growing your own foods, handmade furniture, and wooden toys), whatever your child put in their mouth was likely safe. Think back even farther, to when we actually learned mouthing things is a strategy for survival and it makes even more sense. It's just in this day and age that it has become quite a bit more dangerous.

So how dangerous is it?

Doctors in Australia recently conducted a study – on themselves! Six doctors intentionally swallowed one Lego-man head each and recorded how long it took to pass the poor little guy (likely while their doctor peers sniggered at them behind closed doors). The average Retrieved Time Score, as they termed it, was 1.7 days. Read the study [here](#).

The study did note that Childhood Bowel Transit Time (hilarious, right?) would differ from an adult's and that the heads swallowed were round and inert. A child doesn't always swallow something as benign as a Lego head. Irregularly shaped objects or corrosive objects (like button batteries) are extremely dangerous and require medical attention right away. And it's always in your child's best interest to take them in even if it was a Lego head. Also worth noting is that this study's sample size was incredibly small and one doctor never found their little companion. I suppose it's hard to put a toy through that and expect it to be your friend afterwards. Probably ran for the hills.

So how can you protect your little ones at and out of the home?

Personally, I don't allow any toys with batteries, small or big. The corrosivity of batteries is so aggressive that it will burn holes through organs. They are extremely dangerous.

I also don't keep magnets in the house and double check that my dayhome doesn't have them. Magnets, if swallowed in pairs, can attach themselves through organs, causing gigantic digestive problems for your child.

And I sweep the floor as often as possible. This reduces the chance that my children will find and eat something small while I'm not watching.

I also like to buy bigger toys. Toy makers (Santa) know the dangers of little toys and often provide (deliver) bigger alternatives for the household favourites. Instead of Lego, use Mega Bloks. Instead of dollhouses with little people, use big toy kitchens with large food items or dolls. You get the picture.

Lastly, I like to have things that are okay, even encouraging to chew on. I've purchased quite a few Sophie the Giraffes and Baby Banana Infant Toothbrushes (chew toys made from silicone). These are great toys to have around. Although my babies loved them, they also preferred the dog's chew ball. Go figure.

To sum up, it's not a bad thing for your child to explore his/her surroundings by putting things in their mouths; it's a developmental milestone to cherish! Just be cautious and proactive if they swallow something. By providing them with the right things to chew, this can reduce this risk. It may also help you relax a bit too. Although who doesn't enjoy sweeping seven times a day?