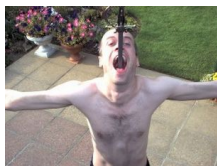


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By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor



Sword Swallowing, a Risky Job

Unusual swords and distraction pose a danger

Sword swallowing is indeed a dangerous job. And costly, too. An investigation showed that sword swallowers are more likely to sustain an injury, such as a perforation of the oesophagus or pharynx if they are distracted or are using multiple or unusual swords. SSAI (Sword Swallowers' Association International) recognize only those sword swallowers who can swallow a non-retractable solid steel blade at least two centimeters wide and 38 centimeters long. English Medical literature cites only two case reports of injury resulting from sword swallowing, despite the obvious danger. Forty-six SSAI members took part in the study investigating the side-effects of sword swallowing. 19 had experienced sore throats whilst learning, many had suffered lower chest pain following some performances, and six had suffered perforation of the pharynx and oesophagus, one other was told a sword had almost touched the heart. The study revealed that these injuries occurred either when swallowers used multiple or unusual swords, or when they were distracted. One swallower lacerated his pharynx when trying to swallow a curved sabre whilst another suffered lacerations after being distracted by a 'misbehaving' macaw on his shoulder. The average age of the sword swallowers involved in the study was 31, most were self-taught and had learned the skill at an average age of 25 years, with nine learning the skill as teenagers. There was no link between height and the length of sword swallowed; the longest sword swallowed was 60 centimeters. As three members of SSAI paid hospitalization bills varying from £12,000 - £37,000 (23,000 - 70,000 US dollars), this is indeed a costly occupation!