



Naval Safety Center

LESSONS LEARNED



LL 20-07

SLIPS TRIPS AND DENTAL TRAUMA

Many of our lessons learned products fall into the general category of “slips, trips, and falls” and for a good reason. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), slips, trips, and falls account for 15% of all accidental deaths — second only to motor vehicle accidents. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, slips, trips, and falls injure one million Americans every year, with 20-30% suffering moderate to severe injuries, including broken bones and head injuries. We’re continuing our plea to our Navy and Marine family (including civilians) to be careful by focusing on one common injury from slips, trips, and falls — face plants; and more specifically, dental trauma. It didn’t take long to find more than 40 examples of head injuries where teeth were “*impacted*” in just the last year. Head injuries are dangerous enough, but when your teeth are involved, it only adds to the misery and can further degrade your fitness for duty. You can’t prevent all slips, trips, or falls, but a quick read through these oral injuries may lessen your chances of an unwanted visit to the dentist (*that, and flossing*).



- A Sailor was going home after work on his bicycle...with a grocery bag attached to the handlebars (*and that’s why you’re reading about him*). During the seemingly uneventful ride home, the bike’s movement caused the bag to “come undone” and make contact with the front wheel. Whatever was in the bag, or the bag itself was enough to cause the Sailor to lose control and fall (*badly*). He was transported by ambulance to the emergency room, where he was treated for a fractured jaw, lacerations to the chin and eyebrow, and several chipped teeth. — *Miraculously, he only lost three workdays getting all the facial repairs done. No word on the bike’s fate, but our Sailor probably isn’t interested in riding it to work for a while anyway. Secure your gear shipmates, at sea and on your bike.*



- Quoting straight from the report, “While walking in the battalion parking lot, Marine 1 approached Marine 2 from behind and tapped him on the shoulder. Marine 2 was startled, turned suddenly, and Marine 1’s hand connected with Marine 2’s mouth, knocking out his tooth” (*Wow, that’s one heck of a powerful head turn!*). The report later adds a hint of information that the Marines were actually “horse playing in the parking lot.” That gives us a clue that there was more to the story. Marine 2 saw a dentist who “cemented his tooth back into his mouth.” — *That sounds less like an approved dental treatment than a hardware store project. Safety tip: Save your Marine Corps Martial Arts Program (MCMAP) practice for a supervised training environment.*

- A Marine was on a patrol when he lost his footing, causing him to fall and strike his mouth on his rifle combat optic, chipping his front tooth (*ouch!*). The narrative reads like a simple stumble, but in the world of Marines, there is nothing simple about a patrol, with extra gear, keeping your head on a swivel, hazards, and inevitable surprises. Luckily for our Marine, this was in a training environment, and he was treated at the dental clinic, with no lost workdays or light duty. — *All we can say to this one is, learn and train as you perform. Yut!*

- Two Marines were skateboarding from the exchange after picking up some beverages and snacks to go to the beach. (*Are there skateboards with storage? We digress*). After departing the exchange, the two started on the sidewalk, and then Marine 1 moved to the shoulder of the road when the sidewalk ran out. We're not sure which route Marine 2 took, because the report doesn't mention him again. On a downhill portion of the road, Marine 1 "began to feel like he was gaining too much speed." He put his foot on the ground to slow down, but harder than he intended. With one foot on and one foot off the board, physics and inertia took over. His ground foot, well, technically stopped him (*or at least part of the lower half of him*), while his other foot and top half kept going. He was thrown from the board, upon which time he impacted the road, broke three teeth, received road rash to his face, and broke his right hand (*eesh!*). Marine 1's instructor took him to the emergency room, where he was treated and released. — *And, unsurprisingly, no lost workdays or light duty for this Marine. Yut!*
- A Sailor was walking in the barracks and slipped on a puddle of water while carrying a glass of water. On impact, the glass broke in his hand, causing a laceration to his left thumb, but it didn't end there. Our unfortunate Sailor continued his slip/fall, chipping one of his teeth on the floor. — *In a naval irony, we're pretty sure that water is not this Sailor's "element," but the good news, he had no lost workdays or light duty. Watch your step shipmates, and keep those decks clear and dry.*
- From the "we can't make this stuff up" locker, we are quoting directly from the report: "A Sailor was at the annual Christmas party and had a few drinks, but was not intoxicated. He was doing a runway walk for best dressed and showing off [*we can only imagine*]. When he got to the end of the walkway, he attempted to do a backflip and slipped. The Sailor did not land correctly and crushed his knee and face." Embarrassed and in an "I meant to do that" moment, he attempted to get back up and then realized he was seriously hurt. — *We don't know if the Sailor won "best dressed," but his presentation was undoubtedly "entertaining" to say the least. With a broken left knee, two teeth missing, 30 days convalescent leave, and 90 days on light duty, it probably wasn't worth the prize.*
- A Marine was riding on a homemade dirt bike fabricated out of a bike frame and a "38cc weed whacker engine." (*OBTW, it was two hours after sunset. SMH. [If you're not a millennial/Gen Z, you can look that up on the web]*). Sometime during the Marine's moonlight Frankenstein-bike ride, he struck a hole at approximately 20 mph. As the bike came to an abrupt stop, the Marine kept going (*curse you, Isaac Newton!*). — *The good news – he was wearing a helmet, jeans, and long sleeve flannel shirt. The bad news – flannel doesn't prevent a broken right clavicle, scrapes to the shoulder and face, and three chipped teeth. Hopefully, our young Frankenstein scrapped his "Weedcycle" bike project altogether.*



Key Takeaways

1. **"The successful warrior is the average man, with laser-like focus."** — Bruce Lee. The lessons here are not new. They are merely portrayed with a dental twist. Most of our warriors in this lesson could have avoided dental disasters by focusing on the task at hand. For others, their lack of focus was compounded by bad decisions. Either way, you can save a trip (or several) to the dentist by exercising safe behaviors off duty the same way you are taught to do on the job.

2. **Wellness leads to readiness.** A significant contributor to our wellness is dental care. The mishaps above demonstrate that inattention or poor life choices will cause you not just a bad day, but you can also suffer long-term health issues in the process. Dental health is tied directly to readiness. If you are deemed dental class 3 (1 being the best), you are not worldwide deployable. Navy and Marine Corps leadership invests heavily in the readiness of our forces. You can do your part for your own readiness by staying focused, making wise decisions, and keeping all the teeth you were issued.

And remember, "Let's be careful out there"