

Accident Warning (October 2015)

Eardrum rupture during waterlining

Due to the significant increase of people practising the Slacklining discipline "Waterlining", we are experiencing a repeatedly occurring injury. As the slackliner hits the water, the air being compressed into the ear can create a tear or hole in the eardrum.

Cause

This injury occurs when the person on a Waterline falls sideways, with the side of the head perpendicular to the surface of the water. The injury can already occur at low height, as it is mostly about how the ear canal is oriented to the water surface on impact.

Symptoms

The Slackliner will notice the trauma immediately. His or her head will feel like being flushed with water. Symptoms furthermore frequently include disorientation, dizziness, a loss of hearing, and temporarily impaired balance, depending on severity. The injury can cause significant pain, sometimes slight bleeding, long-term damage of hearing, deafness or tinnitus, an inflammation of the ear canal as well as secondary problems, such as muscular stiffness in the face / neck, etc.

Therapy

In most, but not all cases, the tear in the eardrum will heal by itself. However, full recovery is rare and the ear is likely to be more susceptible to damage in the future. Submerging the ear in water should be avoided for some time, otherwise inflammation can occur. We strongly advise slackliners experiencing these symptoms to see a doctor as soon as possible. Treatment usually includes antibiotics, eardrops, and painkillers. The healing process can take several months. In severe cases, surgery may be necessary.

Prevention

- Keep uncontrolled falls to a minimum
- Do not enter the water with the side of your head/ear to the water surface. Try to rotate your head to enter back or even face first, which is likely to be safer.
- A headband/cap, neoprene cap, suitable earplugs, or water-resistant headphones can dampen the impact. However, some earplugs/earbuds can still cause a blow to the eardrum in the worst case.
- Consult with a doctor or hearing expert first. Also keep in mind that certain Waterline spots require the person on the slackline to be warned acoustically in case of immediate dangers (driftwood, boat traffic, etc.). Use spotters and decide on how to communicate before getting on the line.

Attention: Keep in mind that a severe injury will require the slackliner to be rescued from the water. We strongly recommend that waterliners familiarize themselves with and practice standard water rescue techniques. A flotation device can also be very helpful. Most importantly, make sure to always keep an eye on people walking waterlines.