

We Are Killing Ourselves



By *Jamie Wells, M.D.* — September 1, 2016



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Monday was my first day at the American Council on Science and Health (ACSH). In an effort to be a welcoming colleague, Dr. Josh Bloom, Senior Director of Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences, called me on the phone. In doing so, he somehow almost broke his hand on a chair. Identifying with the freakish nature of his injury, and after getting an assurance that he was okay, I couldn't stop laughing.

I've done it. Seen it. Treated it.

I assume I'm not alone. So I began thinking about rates of unintentional injury and that time I got badly burned on day one of a trip to a Caribbean Island. What happened? As I attempted to deal with the burn I reached inside my luggage and my hand met with resistance. So, what did I do? I kept persevering, pushing it into the bag— all the while unaware that the cap of my razor had come off and was sheering my finger to bone.

Let's just say the remainder of the trip was marginally less stressful, even though it involved repetitive changes of intense pressure dressings and compulsive sun avoidance. Not an easy task when near the equator during the hottest month of the year.

The National Safety Council publishes an "Odds of Dying Chart" that affirms we are more likely in our lifetime to be killed by everyday activities - and they would like to prevent that, which is why they publish a probability of events. Accidental death is far more likely than being murdered by a gun. There is a 1 in 144 chance of dying from a fall compared to 1 in 6780 from severe thunderstorm, and a 1 in 470 chance of dying in a car as opposed to 1 in 164,968 chance of a lightning strike.

22 people will be killed by a cow this year, on average, that's 500 percent more than will die by

sharks.

Maybe only Josh Bloom and I can imagine bovine murder happening to us.

Or maybe not. According to the Office of Women's Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, unintentional injuries are the #3 cause of death in the U.S. and account for 1 of every 4 visits to the ER. In 2013, the CDC indicated the unintentional injury death total was 130,557 (with total ER visits at 31 million in 2011). Leading causes were fall, motor vehicle traffic and poisoning. As per the Center for Disease Control Childhood Injury Report (data from 2000-2006), unintentional injuries were the leading cause of morbidity and mortality among children—caused by burns, drowning, falls, poisoning and road traffic. Among 0-19 year olds, >9.2 million were treated in the ER for nonfatal injuries while >12,000 die by these accidents.

If you don't want to end up like me or Josh or, worse, dead, here are some positions ACSH has long advocated:

- Observe traffic laws— wear seat belt, follow speed limit, no cell phone usage, if tired don't drive
- Avoid driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or riding with an impaired driver
- Maintain your home environment—wipe spills, tuck away prominent cords, install hand-rails, bath mats, fix or remove problems, check carbon monoxide detectors & fire alarms
- Only use *your* own prescription medications as prescribed by *your* physician
- Safety gear use in sports and recreational activities (i.e. helmets)
- Follow safety rules in the workplace
- Learn to swim
- Be careful with ladders, power tools and chemicals. As Josh can attest, especially all three at the same time.
- Get some knowledge of CPR and first aid

You probably don't need a study to recognize that being cognizant of your surroundings is a good idea. Go have fun, but watch out for those office chairs. They really may be out to get you.

For more statistics and thorough safety advisories, check out:

The National Safety Council: www.nsc.org [2]

CDC, National Center for Injury Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/> [3]

Office of Women's Health at U.S. Department of Health & Human Services:

<http://www.womenshealth.gov/mens-health/top-health-concerns-for-men/accidents-unintentional-injuries.html> [4]

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[3] <https://www.cdc.gov/injury/>

[4] <http://www.womenshealth.gov/mens-health/top-health-concerns-for-men/accidents-unintentional-injuries.html>