



FOR RELEASE FEBRUARY 17, 2009

Sword Swallowers Association International
www.swordswallow.org • www.swordswallow.com
+1(615) 969-2568 • +1(256) 341-8969

Sword swallowers available for appearances, comments, interviews, and medical demonstrations
Media contact: Dan Meyer +1 (615) 969.2568 Dan@swordswallow.com

Thank a Sword Swallower on 'Sword Swallower's Day'!

HARTSELLE, AL (SSAI) -- If you've had an x-ray, an endoscopy, a fluoroscopy, or an electrocardiogram, you might want to thank a sword swallower!

And 'Sword Swallower's Day' on February 28th is just the day to do it!

According to the Sword Swallowers Association Int'l (SSAI), February 28th is 'International Sword Swallower's Awareness Day', a day set aside at the end of February, 'National Swallowing Disorders Month,' for sword swallowers around the world to swallow swords all together to raise awareness of the contributions sword swallowers have made, not only to the art of sword swallowing, but also in the fields of science and medicine.

On Sword Swallower's Day February 28th, sword swallowers around the world will perform medical demonstrations for doctors, nurses and patients at hospitals, medical centers and universities to dispel myths about the art, to raise awareness about contributions sword swallowers have made to the fields of medical science, and to honor veteran sword swallowers, with some performers attempting to set individual and small group records. At the end of the day, participating sword swallowers will document their activities in reports to be submitted to SSAI for review and consideration for an SSAI group record.

Medical Facts and Trivia about Sword Swallowing - Did you know?

- Sword Swallowing is a 4000 year old art that originated in India around 2000 BC.
 - The average person swallows about 600 times per day – 350 while awake, 200 while eating, and about 50 times while asleep.
 - The average swallow uses 50 pairs of muscles and can take from 3-23 seconds to complete.
 - Sword swallowers use mind-over-matter techniques to repress the gag reflex in the back of the mouth, the peristalsis reflex in the throat, and the retch reflex in the stomach to "swallow" solid steel blades from 15-30 inches in length.
 - Sword swallowing can take from 2 years to 7 years to learn, and even after years of practice, some people never learn to master it.
 - SSAI reports that there are on average between 4-6 serious sword swallowing related injuries reported around the world each year that require medical attention and hospitalization, with dozens more that go unreported each year.
 - Treatment of sword swallowing injuries can cost up to \$25,000-\$75,000 per injury.
- This might help explain why there are currently less than a few dozen full-time professional sword swallowers left performing around the world today!

Medical History of Sword Swallowing over the past 140 years

1868 - Dr. Adolph Kussmaul enlists a sword swallower to develop the first rigid endoscope at the university in Freiburg, Germany. Kussmaul was so pleased with his success that he took the sword swallower with him to perform demonstrations in various clinics, and later enlisted other sword swallowers due to their ability to voluntarily relax the cricopharyngeal muscle and form a straight line from the pharynx to the stomach, allowing passage of the rigid endoscope.

FOR RELEASE FEBRUARY 17, 2009

FOR RELEASE FEBRUARY 17, 2009

1894 – Doctors at the Metropolitan Throat Hospital in New York are amazed when sword swallower Chevalier Cliquot swallows 14 swords at one time. When the sword swallower appeared to be in pain, Dr. G.B. Hope rushed forward and yanked out the swords, causing lacerations in the esophagus and injuring the performer, leaving him incapacitated for months. After recovery, Cliquot performed lectures for doctors at the Rush Medical College in Chicago, and the University of Liverpool in England, among other places.

1897 - Dr. Stevens, a Scottish physician, conducts experiments on digestion by enlisting a sword swallower to swallow metallic tubes pierced with holes filled with pieces of meat. After a length of time, the sword swallower disgorged the tubes and the doctor observed the degree of digestion that had taken place. This sword swallower also showed the doctors to what extent the pharynx could be stretched, resulting in the invention of the tube of Faucher, the esophageal sound, lavage, and illumination of the stomach by electric light.

1906 – Dr. Cremer performs first esophageal electrocardiogram on a sword swallower in Wales.

1908 – In an article in the American Journal of Medical Sciences, Dr. Hald reports his observations in esophagoscopy in a sword swallower. The esophagus had been largely distended due to the sword swallower's practice, and the cricoidean zone of the pharynx was patent and larger than normal, with an excoriation on the posterior wall of the cricoid cartilage. Surprisingly, the sword swallower could not support the examination any better than other subjects, his esophagus apparently more accustomed to flat foreign bodies than cylindrical ones.

1930s – Sword swallower Delno Fritz dies of pneumonia developed as a result of a screw that came loose and lodged in his lung while testing a bronchioscope for doctors in Pennsylvania.

December 2006 - The [British Medical Journal](#) publishes the first internationally recognized medical research study on sword swallowing injuries entitled "[Sword swallowing and its side effects](#)". Results of the study show that sword swallowing injuries are most likely to occur when multiple swords are swallowed, when unusual feats are performed beyond the scope of a "regular" sword swallow, or after a previous minor injury when tissue is tender and swollen.

October 2007 – The 2007 [Ig Nobel Prize in Medicine](#) is awarded to sword swallower Dan Meyer, SSAI Executive Director, and his co-author Dr. Brian Witcombe, SSAI Medical Advisor, at Harvard University for their paper "[Sword swallowing and its side effects](#)".

March 2009 - Sword swallowing will be featured on the [2009 Ig Nobel Tour of the UK](#) at British universities and science centers as part of **National Science and Engineering Week** sponsored by the **British Association for the Advancement of Science**.

The [Sword Swallowers Association International](#), founded in 2001 to preserve the art of sword swallowing, is comprised of sword swallowers from around the world and maintains a site with general information on sword swallowing for the general public at www.swordswallow.com. To schedule a local sword swallower for a medical demonstration, interview or other appearance in your area for [International Sword Swallowers Day](#) on February 28th, contact [SSAI](#).

To schedule a sword swallowing lecture for a science/medical event in the UK on the [2009 Ig Nobel Tour](#) during Britain's **National Science and Engineering Week** (March 6-15, 2009), contact **Marc Abrahams** at +1(617) 491-4437 or e-mail marca@improbable.com

END # #

Media Contact:

Dan Meyer, Executive Director
Sword Swallowers Association Int'l
Dan@swordswallow.com
(+1) (615) 969-2568 (GMT -6:00 CST)
www.swordswallow.org (SSAI)

2009 Ig Nobel UK Tour:

Marc Abrahams, Editor
Annals of Improbable Research
marca@improbable.com
(+1) (617) 491-4437 (EST)
www.improb.com/ig/ig-pastwinners.html (Ig Nobels)

FOR RELEASE FEBRUARY 17, 2009