

You are What You Eat...Banana Slips and Fractured Hips

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Abstract

Slipping on food is an uncommon cause for sustaining lower limb fractures and not reported in the literature. We present a case series of patients with femoral fractures; one subsequent to slipping on a banana skin, the other following slipping on a prawn. Hip and femoral fractures are a huge financial burden on the NHS with the incidence of such injuries set to increase.

We discuss the historical events in the late 19th century that ultimately gave the banana skin the slippery reputation it has today. Whilst perhaps less of a public risk factor today, foodstuffs such as the humble banana skin present a valid health risk to patients, in particular the elderly.

Keywords: *Banana Slips; Fractured Hips; Femoral Fractures*

Introduction

In 2017, over 65,000 hip fractures were treated in UK hospitals- the commonest cause for orthopaedic admissions [1,2]. The average patient age is 77 years and total fiscal burden around £2 billion per annum in the UK [2].

Slipping on food is an uncommon cause for sustaining lower limb fractures and not reported in the literature. We present a case series of patients with femoral fractures; one subsequent to slipping on a banana skin, the other following slipping on a prawn.

Methods

We performed an extensive literature search for banana and other foodstuffs related falls and have not found any previous case reports or series.

Cases

Patient 1 was a fit and well, freely mobile 67-year-old female. She slipped on a prawn whilst shopping in her local supermarket, landing on her left hip and was unable to weight bear on her left leg thereafter. Radiographs on admission to hospital revealed a minimally displaced left sided intracapsular neck of femur fracture (A0 31-B1) operatively managed with a dynamic hip screw (DHS) and cannulated screws. The patient made an uneventful recovery.

Patient 2 was a Gentleman who slipped on a banana skin and fell into the road and was hit by a taxi. He sustained a mid-shaft femoral fracture and subsequently underwent an open reduction internal fixation with an intramedullary nail. The patient made an uneventful recovery.

Discussion

Whilst a prawn is not a food item that commonly springs to mind as a risk factor causing falls, the banana skin is a well-known slippery hazard. Many foodstuffs, and indeed household items, can easily cause orthopaedic injuries. According to Rahmani, *et al.* there has been

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an apparent recent increase in avocado related hand injuries [3]. Classically, the patients hold the avocado in their non-dominant hand while using a knife to cut/peel the fruit with their dominant hand [3]. The mechanism of injury is usually a stabbing injury to the non-dominant hand as the knife slips past the stone, through the soft avocado fruit [3].

However, the banana is the only food item that has developed such a reputation for being responsible for falls and injuries. So why is this the case?

The banana skin was famed as a slippery trip hazard having been the centre of many slap stick comedy sketches in the early 20th Century. It first appeared on the silver screen in the 1917 silent short film 'The Flirt,' in which a dissatisfied customer in a restaurant threw his banana peel on the floor which the waiter, carrying a fully loaded tray, then slipped on, with chaos ensuing thereafter [4]. It was used as the centre of slap-stick comedy scenes in several other silent films in the early 20th century and more recently as a fairly common feature in cartoon animated shows. To computer gamers, the banana skin is a well-known slippery weapon in the popular 1992 video game, Mario Kart.

Before its use in slapstick comedy the banana skin was considered a genuine public hazard, well documented in the USA. In the mid-19th century, Carl B. Frank imported bananas from Panama to New York City, with the fruit quickly gaining popularity. However, with the lack of sanitation regulations in addition to people throwing their rubbish on the streets, a build-up of decomposing banana skins frequently occurred on city streets. In 1880, 'Harper's Weekly,' an American political magazine based in New York City, warned against anyone throwing their banana skins on a public walkway as this would 'likely result in broken bones.' In 1909, the City Council of St. Louis USA outlawed 'throwing or casting' a banana skin on public thoroughfares.

According to the book 'Banana: The Fate of the Fruit that Changed the World' by Dan Koeppel, the banana skin epidemic was solved in the early 20th century when a former Civil War Colonel George Waring organised a fleet of informed workers to sweep the streets and dispose of the rubbish in composting facilities [5]. This was the first large-scale recycling effort in the USA [5].

Following review of the literature, this is the first case series of orthopaedic lower limb injuries caused by foodstuffs, in particular the banana skin and prawn.

Conclusion

Hip and femoral fractures are a huge financial burden on the NHS with the incidence of such injuries set to increase. The majority of falls that result in fragility lower limb fractures are simply avoidable mechanical slips or trips. Foodstuffs like the humble banana skin, whilst perhaps less of a public risk factor today, present a valid health risk to patients, but in particular the elderly. We are what we eat.

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