

Canadian surgeons urge people to throw out bristle BBQ brushes

<https://ca.news.yahoo.com/canadian-surgeons-urge-people-throw-093000563.html>



Canadian surgeons are urging people to throw out wire-bristled barbecue brushes, because none of them have figured out a surefire way of removing the wires when they get stuck in people's throats.

The thin, sharp wires can come off the brushes, attach to barbecue grills and cling to food without being noticed. If it's swallowed it can cause damage to the throat and epiglottis, which is the flap of cartilage that covers the opening of the windpipe when swallowing. That's when surgeons can be called in to help.

"It's a needle in a haystack, but the haystack is your tongue," said Dr. Ian Dempsey, an otolaryngologist in Dartmouth, N.S. *"It's not an easy structure to go fishing around in, especially when it gets embedded in deeply."*

Hoping brushes will be eliminated

The issue of barbecue brush bristles has become so widespread that it came up at this year's meeting of the Canadian Society of Otolaryngology. During a discussion on ingested foreign objects that are difficult to remove, Dempsey said several ear, nose and throat surgeons spoke about their challenging surgeries. "None of us have figured out a surefire way to get rid of them, so we'd prefer just to prevent it from happening in the first place," Dempsey said. *"We're hoping that if enough people raise this issue, hopefully we'll just eliminate those types of brushes from the market and use a safer alternative."*

'Deeper in and lower down'

Dempsey, who likened the surgery to removing an acupuncture needle from a grapefruit without damaging any part of the fruit, said the number of cases across Canada isn't tracked. Hospitals in the Halifax area are seeing at least one or two cases **each week**, he said, adding that many of the wires can be removed by emergency room physicians but a few "get deeper in and lower down" and require surgery.

'This crazy pain'

That was the case for Lisa Wadden two years ago. The Dartmouth, N.S., woman ate a burger her husband had barbecued and noticed something pierce her throat. *"Every swallow, it just was this crazy pain, burning,"* she said. *"It was like I was being poked again with it every single time that I swallowed."*

X-rays showed Wadden had swallowed a thin wire about 1.5 centimetres long, which had become embedded in her throat. Over four months, she had multiple CT scans, X-rays, scopes and **two unsuccessful attempts** to remove it through surgery. Dempsey, who was Wadden's otolaryngologist, told her it was best to wait for scar tissue to build up around the wire and lessen the pain.

'Nothing I could have seen'

Wadden, who said she wasn't using an old or inexpensive brush, still has the wire embedded in her throat. It doesn't cause her daily pain, she said. *"It happened in the blink of an eye. There was nothing I could have done, nothing I could have seen,"* she said. *"If anyone's having a barbecue that has a metal-cleaning brush, I won't even go close to that."*

And some people **may not notice right away** that they've swallowed a bristle. It happened to Kevin Gallant, who struggled with unexplained stomach issues for about a year and a half before having surgery. In the end, surgeons found a brush bristle and part of Gallant's small intestine had to be removed. *"I was very ill, probably as close to death as you want to be,"* he said from his home in Summerside, P.E.I. *"The barbecue brush bristle had started to move, so it was trying to come through the wall of my small intestine. So I was told I was very fortunate that they found it, because it would have just pierced through the small intestine into one of my major organs until it found a spot that it would have just killed me."*