

The Dallas Morning News

Video: Pregnant Dallas woman enjoys ‘danger’ of swallowing swords

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In front of a live audience, Veronica Hernandez will stick a 14-inch blade down her throat at 9 months pregnant.

“It’s hard enough being a pregnant woman who already has gone through morning sickness,” says Hernandez, who goes by the stage name Jai Le Bait. She’ll activate those gag reflexes once more as she slowly puts a sword down her throat [at World Sword Swallower’s Day in Grand Prairie on Feb. 28.](#)

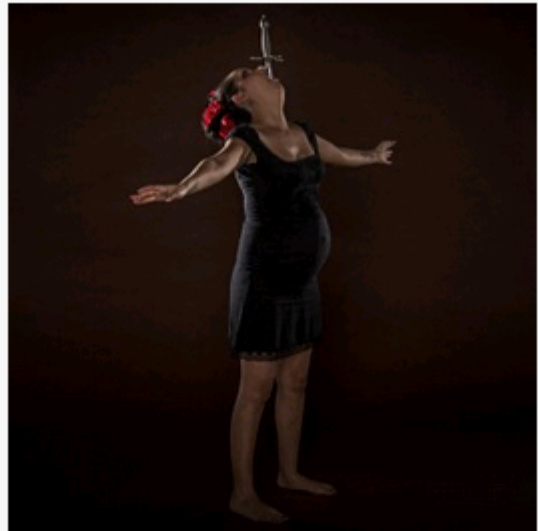
Could that be dangerous to the baby, I had to wonder? “The human body is awesome,” says the Dallas mom. “This is my one opportunity to show off what my body is capable of doing pregnant. [Let's] just hope my son isn't born with a pierced ear!”

Jai Le Bait is part of a very small fraternity of sword swallowers. In fact, only a few dozen people participate in this style of circus performance art worldwide, and only 15 percent of those are women, says Dan Meyer, president of Sword Swallowers Association International.

It isn't a trick, either: The performers at Ripley's Believe It or Not on Feb. 28 are actually swallowing swords. Meyer estimates it took him about 13,000 tries over four years before he successfully swallowed his first sword.

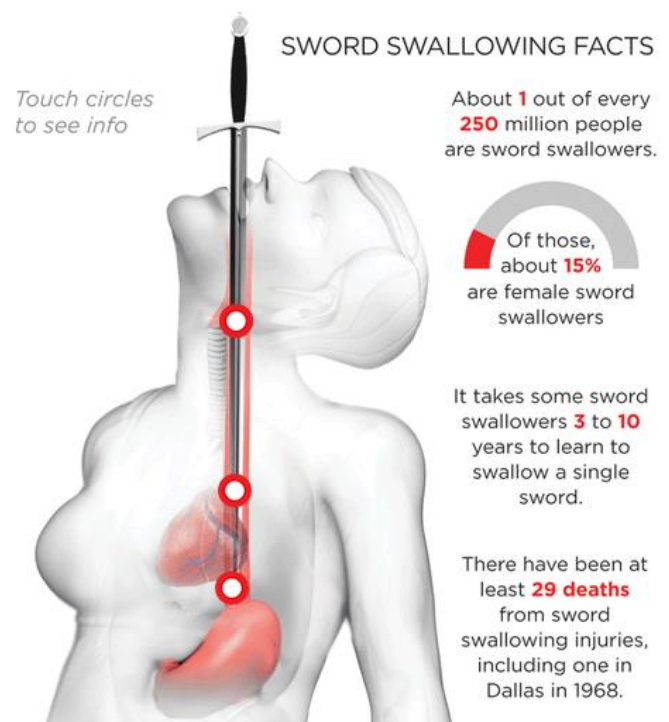
Gulp!

Performers at World Sword Swallower's Day honor those who have died from their injuries, like Dallas' Rosemary Puente, who died in 1968 from a 1/4 inch cut at the age of 25, Meyer says. He reports that sword swallowing has resulted in at least 29 deaths.



G.J. McCarthy/The Dallas Morning News

Veronica "Jai Le Bait" Hernandez has been sword swallowing for two and a half years. Here she is, performing just a few weeks before her son is born.



SOURCE: Dan Meyer, president of Sword Swallowers Association International

Michael Hogue/Staff Artist

Tricks of the blade: Dallas performer Rachael “Frankie Stiletto” Williams cuts down sword-swallowing myths

The Dallas Morning News: Is sword swallowing considered magic?

Frankie Stiletto: Sword swallowing is not a trick; it is not magic in any way. [The sword] enters the mouth, goes down the throat, past the voice box, passes by the epiglottis.

... As it travels down further into your chest, [it] nudges the heart to the side slightly. We can, for example, feel our heartbeat on the sword.

[Then] it enters through the stomach and finds its resting spot in the stomach. ... It is absolutely not a trick.

Whoa. So when did you decide this was something you’d like to try?

I have always been very different, even among circus freaks. I happen to know someone who has been doing sword swallowing for about 20 years, and he agreed to teach me.

The reason I keep doing it is, believe it or not, now that my body is used to it, it’s very calming.

Nothing forces you to live in the present moment quite like a sword going down your throat. Letting your mind wander in that situation could be fatal.

What does it take to be successful?

[I had to] do a lot of other mind-body training before I touched the sword. It is very surreal the first time you swallow a sword: You have to train [your body] to do all these things it’s not supposed to do.

The learning process is a long and grueling one. Not everyone has the stomach for it, so to speak. It takes a lot of determination.

How often do you swallow swords?

I practice every day. I don't perform every day, but I practice every day. It's essential.

Can it cut the insides of your body?

It absolutely can happen, and that's why it's one of the most dangerous things people can do. ... Don't try it at home, don't try it at all. Let *us* be the crazy ones.

Staying calm in front of a boisterous audience sounds difficult, especially given the task. How do you concentrate?

I am a performer, so that sort of interaction is something I enjoy. ... Even in the middle of a large audience, when you have a sword down your throat, you have to be very present in that moment.

Is pulling the sword out just as grueling?

It's a different set of muscles ... It is not as difficult to remove as it is to swallow. But you're definitely fighting back your gag reflexes the entire time. It's still something that's counterintuitive to your body.

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You can see Frankie Stiletto, Jai Le Bait and others swallow swords at [an event](#) that begins at 1:30 p.m. Feb 28 at Ripley's Believe It or Not, 601 East Palace Parkway in Grand Prairie. The "official swallow" takes place during the show at 2:28 p.m., in honor of the 2/28/15 date.

All sword swallowers in the area are invited to participate.



A full version of this article can be found at:

<http://popcultureblog.dallasnews.com/2015/02/pregnant-sword-swallower-dallas.html/>