

HOOKS Can be Hazardous to Your Health

You want to hook fish, not people, so the best practice is prevention and using protective gear whenever possible.



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for WorkSafeBC

- Removing lightly or shallowly embedded hooks, apply downward pressure to the shank of the hook, forcing the hook onward so the point and barb pierce the skin again. Then cut off or file down the barb before pulling out the hook along its path of entry.

The graphic drawing shows another method, the “twine and yank” technique. Tie together the ends of a 20-inch piece of twine to form a loop. Put one side of the loop over the back of your hand and down between thumb and forefinger. Put the other side over the eye of the hook where it curves toward the point piercing the skin. Immobilize the injured hand, and apply downward pressure on the shank toward the point of entry to make an opening for the barb. At the same time, use your other hand with the twine to give a sharp jerk on the line. The hook should pop out of the wound without making it worse.

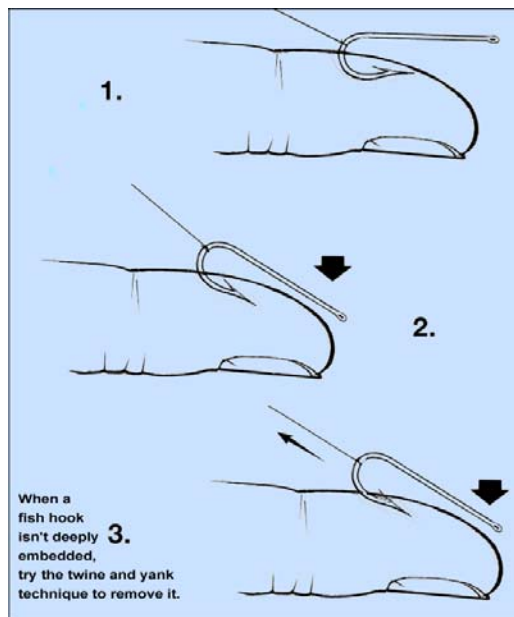
I saw this type of accident while I was fishing with two shipmates fishing in Alaska. Martin had a hook fly into his mouth from a halibut he was gaffing, and on another boat, a hook through the middle of Ray’s hand ended his fishing trip.

Whether trolling, longlining or jigging, fishhooks can be dangerous. A hooked salmon breaking the surface can have the hook fly from its mouth at fishermen in the cockpit. Trolling for tuna at high speed, jigs can tear out and catapult toward the cockpit. Crewmembers can get hooked setting longline gear, snapping on leaders when trolling, letting lines out and handling jigs. Gaff hooks and jigs lying around also pose a danger.

If your shipmate gets hooked It’s essential to remove an embedded hook as soon as possible to prevent inflammation and potential poisoning.

Most fishhook injuries are soft tissue wounds to the hand, face or upper body. Barbed hooks can be particularly difficult to remove without causing further damage, particularly if imbedded in an eye. You need an evaluation by a qualified person for eye injuries or wounds involving bones, tendons, blood vessels or nerves. But some hooks can be removed and the wounds treated onboard.

- Consider the type of hook, injury location, penetration depth and the injured person’s pain tolerance. For hooks with more than one point, tape or cut the uninvolved points during the removal procedure to prevent additional damage or injury to whoever is removing the hook.



With the hook gone, clean the wound immediately with antiseptic; and apply antibiotic ointment and a simple dressing.

This brings us back to my Alaska shipmates. Ray left our vessel by helicopter for removal of the hook at a hospital in Alaska, then flew to Seattle and finally home to Vancouver. Martin’s boat lost a day’s fishing to take him in to a fish camp for airlifting to hospital. He was very lucky he had false teeth. Otherwise, with the hook pulling his face against the roller, Martin’s jawbone and teeth could have been shattered. Some luck!

Email comments to Elen.Hanson@worksafebc.com, or phone her at 604-233-4008 in the Lower Mainland and toll-free elsewhere in BC to 1-888-621-7233.



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