

# Wisconsin Medical Society: WMJ: Falls from tree stands result in high incidence of spinal injuries

Posted on Wednesday, Jan 3, 2018

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MADISON – With a nine-day firearm deer hunting season in November, and a five-month bow and arrow season from September into January, there are many Wisconsin hunters using tree stands and risking injury from falls. The authors of a [study](#) published in the most recent issue of [WMJ](#) reviewed the University of Wisconsin Hospital and Clinics' trauma database to determine the number and type of tree-stand related injuries from 1999 to 2013.

One hundred seventeen patients were identified as suffering trauma related to falls from a tree stand, 65 of whom (55%) suffered one or more spinal fractures. The patients were predominantly men with an average age of 45. Forty-four had two or more spine fractures, and one patient had as many as nine fractures. A majority of the patients suffered additional injuries, including rib fractures, punctured lungs, pelvic and extremity fractures, and organ and head injuries.

A wide range of factors were found to have contributed to the falls from tree stands, but authors Kimberly Hamilton, MD, Brandon Rocque, MD, MS, and Nathaniel Brooks, MD, also found that their research reflected minimal use of safety harnesses, leading them to conclude that the primary treatment for tree stand fall injuries is prevention.

“Educational initiatives published previously demonstrates that increased public awareness of the risks associated with hunting and tree stand use led to fewer tree

stand falls associated with spinal cord injury,” wrote the authors. “It is our hope to lower the rate of tree stand falls in Wisconsin through increased patient education and public awareness about the appropriate use of safety harnesses and tree stands, and to see a secondary decrease in the number of traumatic spinal injuries in hunters.”

Published by the [Wisconsin Medical Society](#), *WMJ* is a peer-reviewed publication devoted to the interests of the medical profession and health care in the Midwest.