

Scratching Post

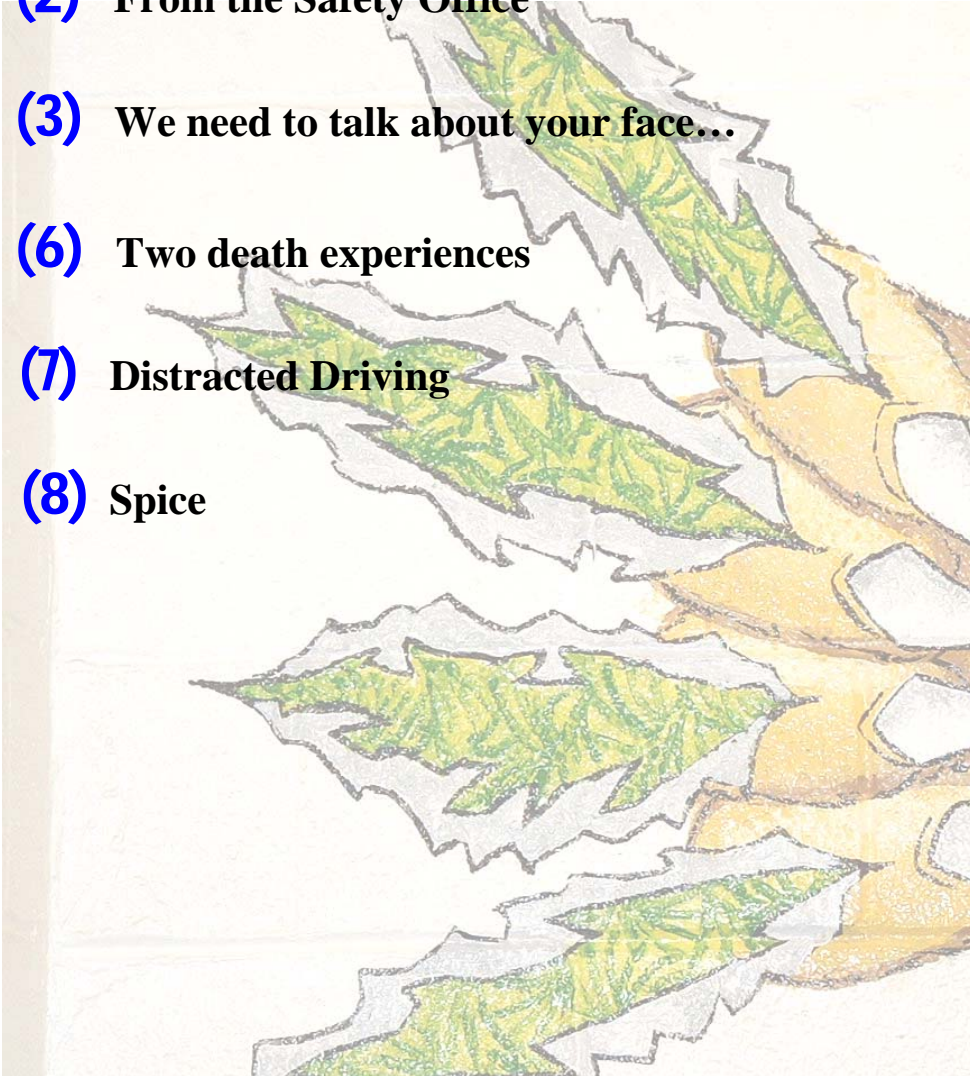


Decision Making



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Words from the Skipper

CDR Virgle Reeves

VT-10 Commanding Officer



Fellow Wildcats,

Welcome to another edition of the award winning “Scratching Post”. This edition is near and dear to my heart because it is focused on decision making during the critical days of summer. I love this time of year and especially here in Pensacola. This is the home of Naval Aviation and we – YOU - are a part of that home and tradition.

The Wildcat Safety team has done an exceptional job putting together this edition with emphasis on summer safety. Please read and learn from the articles. Also, please heighten your sense of awareness for ground safety issues, especially as we enter the hot summer months. Areas of concern include: traffic safety (2 wheels and 4) boating, drinking and driving, and recreational sports

accidents. Also always stay alert with your buds and let’s prevent suicide from the inside. In Training Air Wing Six, we have unfortunately seen tough examples over the last three years in each of these categories. I ask you all to learn from other’s mistakes. Think about your actions, look out for each other, and remain vigilant.

The squadron is performing exceedingly well and you have my sincere gratitude. Keep working hard, enjoy the Summer sun, spend some well deserved time with your families, and keep focused on our mission of providing the finest aviation warriors to the fleet.

Skipper “Dirty”

From the Safety Office

This issue of the Scratching Post deals with decision making. NATOPS defines decision making as the ability to choose a course of action using logical and sound judgment based on the available information. Making a decision occurs in all facets of life. Our profession of Naval Aviation often requires rapid decision making “on the fly”, but also in our daily lives.

There are many ways to make decisions. We make most decision subconsciously, without being aware of them. Other ways to decide include the ORM process, making a pros/cons list, deciding by peer pressure, and making decisions randomly.

In the graphic below, decide which option you would choose for the top and bottom example.



Did you choose based on rationalization? Did you choose based on emotion? The man is pointing to the option that most people choose. The interesting thing is that, on average, either choice will result in the same amount of people that live and die.

The articles presented here deal with some form of decision making: the decision to go flying, the decision to operate vehicles safely, the decision to use illegal substances. Think about how you decide and how that affects your life and your work.

We need to talk about your face...

LCDR Jacob Kropog

I'm not a doctor and I won't claim to be as smart as one. Therefore, the analogies and explanations I will use in this article aren't exactly technical but I did get a Flight Doc to say that they were good enough. Just don't go quoting this stuff at the clinic and expect to be taken seriously.

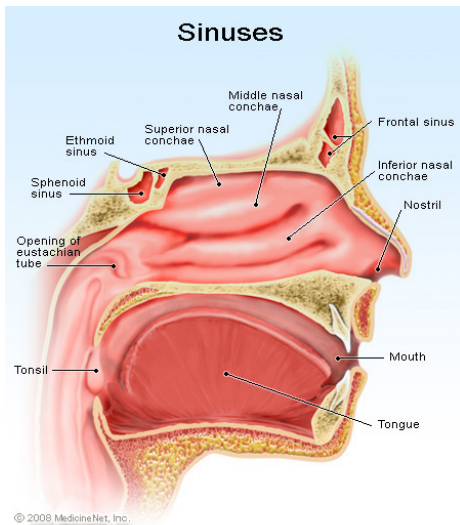
I was out doing weekend ops in a T-6. I had been feeling kind of full in the sinuses lately so I was paying close attention to them. When I woke up this particular morning I made sure I could clear both ears via valsalva and I could breathe through both nostrils. I had experienced a sinus block in flight many years before and I didn't want to repeat the incident. It was pretty painful. Since everything seemed to be working and I wasn't in any pain, I wasn't too worried about having any kind of sinus problems during the flight. During the ORM portion of the brief I let my student know that I had some stuffiness but I felt fine and I could clear my head, if I had any problems during the flight I would let him know. So off we went.

We leveled off at 14000ft and everything was ok. During the descent into KGPT, I aggressively cleared my ears to stay ahead of any potential sinus blocks or to spot any sinus blocks early. My ears cleared just fine several times in a row so, life was good. I had apparently ORM'd everything just fine, right? But then as we descended through 4000ft and into a cloud deck, things began to feel strange. I began to feel what can best be described as needles poking the inside of my face just below and to the right of my right nostril. I valsalva'd again but it didn't help. Luckily our clearance was to 3000ft so I slowed the descent rate down to about 500 feet per minute and leveled off there. The pain never became unbearable but it was definitely uncomfortable. I knew it was my sinuses and I had no intentions of testing them. I let my student know what was going on and that we were going to return to Pensacola. I requested 5000ft for the return and flew direct to KPNS for a visual straight in. I picked 5000ft because I wanted to relieve some of the pressure off of my sinuses but I didn't want to go through the process of climbing all the way back up and putting my face through the same pressure change process. I wanted to spend time at lower altitudes so it (my face) could begin equalizing the pressure. We still had plenty of gas so it wasn't a problem. I picked a visual straight in so I could control the descent rate all the way through the approach without any step downs or glideslopes to deal with. The approach back into Pensacola was uneventful and with minimal discomfort.

Since it was a holiday weekend I didn't see the Flight Doc until Tuesday, who immediately grounded me even though I felt fine. Why? Basically, he said that since I felt some pain I had more than likely done some sort of damage to the lining of my sinuses. I never had any sinus bleeding from the incident but the event had undoubtedly stressed them.

He wanted me to let them completely heal up and for my head to clear up so that it would definitely not happen again. After a week things cleared up everything was fine.

So what happened and what are the implications? First, let's talk about pressure in your head. You've all heard about this in flight physiology class. As you climb to a higher altitude, the air becomes less dense and expands. Your Eustachian tubes, sinuses, and other orifices in your head do not have an airtight seal and therefore allow the air and fluids (goo) in your head to equalize with the air around it. As you descend the same thing takes place but sometimes you have to help it out with a valsalva or two. That is how it's supposed to work.



Where you begin to have problems is when there is extra pressure in your head on the ground due to extra "goo" from a head cold, sinus infection, sinus flare up, etc. This can block some of the passages in your head and not allow for easy, pain free changes in pressure. Basically, some parts of your head become nearly airtight. When this happens, your head, or parts

of it, begin to get a big pressure differential with the ambient air. It's just like what the cabin pressurization system is doing with the outside air, only your head has lower tolerances and it doesn't have a RAM/DUMP switch.

It affects people in different ways. Sometimes, it's the ascent that affects people. Usually that's because their ears or something in their head is completely blocked before they ever take off. As they climb, they begin to get severe pain as the outside pressure increases. But most of the time it's the descent that hurts people. If it's the inner ear they basically can't valsalva fast enough to match the descent rate or the valsalva isn't working at all. In my case, one of the front sinus cavities was slow to equalize the pressure, and that is not easily fixed through valsalva. The worst case in any of these scenarios is damage to the inner ear or sinus walls. With that big of a pressure differential, something has got to give. If the damage is severe enough, it could require surgery, cause hearing damage, or just flat out end your career. That's bad. Another thing to consider is that if it's during the descent, you're usually not going to experience many problems until you go below 5000ft. That's not a hard and fast number, but below around 5000ft is where the biggest atmospheric pressure changes usually take place. And it usually gets worse the closer you get to the ground. Therefore, you can fly for hours at higher altitudes and not know there is anything wrong until setting up for the approach.

So, what do you do to prevent this? What do you do if it surprises you when you are already airborne? First you should try to recognize the situation before you take off. Here are some simple, aircrew friendly steps:

1. Can you clear *both* of your ears on the ground via valsalva? If the answer is no, DON'T FLY!

2. Can you breathe through your nose? If the answer is no, DON'T FLY!

3. Do you feel painful sinus pressure in your face? If the answer is yes, DON'T FLY!

In my case, my answers were “Yes, Yes, and No”. I just had a little stuffiness but I felt fine. I guess I'll have to listen to my head a little closer from now on.



That's the prevention part. If you are already airborne, the first step is to level off! That's whether you are climbing or descending. Obviously, there is some sort of pressure change taking place that your head doesn't like, so stop it! It might also help to stay at that altitude for a while. This could allow for the pressure to slowly equalize and relieve some of the pain. But regardless of whether you are climbing or descending, the bottom line is sooner or later you have to land. There lies the biggest problem. If it was during the climb, then going back down will probably make things better but one still needs to be careful. Make it a nice slow descent. But if it's during the descent, leveling off will stop the pain but sooner or later you have to keep descending. The only real solution is a very slow descent, leveling off as necessary. If it's really bad, descend a little, then fly level for a while to let the pressures equalize. Then descend a little more, and do it again. It may take some time and coordination so plan accordingly. If this doesn't fix it then you probably shouldn't have been flying in the first place. But remember, the worst thing you can do is not tell the rest of your crew. If you think it's happening, speak up!

Another safety precaution is to carry a bottle of Afrin in your pocket. If things get out of hand it can get you cleared up enough to land. It's a last ditch effort but it's better than the alternative. It's also flight doc approved and recommended. After my incident I began carrying one in my flightsuit pocket. I should have been doing it years ago.

Let's recap. If you think you head has more “goo” than normal, begin determining whether you can fly or not. Ask yourself the previously mentioned questions. If you fail any of those questions, DON'T FLY! If you are already airborne and you begin having problems, NOTIFY THE CREW and LEVEL OFF! If you have a bottle of Afrin onboard, consider using it to get down safely. All descents must be slow well planned with occasional level offs as necessary. If you feel pain in your face while flying, THAT'S BAD, tell your crew. If you can't clear your ears, THAT'S BAD, tell your crew. If you are feeling any of these symptoms on the ground, THAT'S BAD, don't fly. Pay attention to what your head is telling you and be smart. If it's just a training sortie, it can wait till another day.

Two Death Experiences

Capt Dan Kinnecom

In 2004, while stationed in Quantico, I bought a motorcycle with no previous riding experience. I decided to do this after watching and listening to my friend who absolutely loved his sport bike. I did my research, shopped around, and ended up with a sport bike of my own. Now the only problem was I had no idea how to operate the motorcycle. My friend rode it home for me and began teaching me how to ride in a parking lot. Pretty soon we began to hit all the curvy roads through the woods in Virginia...leaning, accelerating, going fast. It was great!

Flash forward to 2012, I am reading the Marine Corps Times and see a Marine Captain has died in a motorcycle crash in San Diego. It was my friend, the guy that taught me how to ride, the guy that had years and years of high performance motorcycling under his belt. He left behind his wife and children. It was a single vehicle crash with no alcohol involved. He was not riding at an excessive rate of speed. Somehow he just lost control and hit a guardrail.



About a week later, another friend stationed in Yuma is driving into work. Right in front of him, he witnesses a car hit a motorcycle. He stops, calls 911, and begins providing CPR to the motorcyclist, who is barely alive. He continues CPR until an ambulance arrives, but finds out later that the motorcyclist died from his injuries shortly thereafter.

When I checked into the AV-8B FRS in 2006, my CO told me that recently two students were arrested for riding their motorcycles at approximately 150 mph. He ordered me (and every other motorcycle rider) to ride motorcycles safely or he would end our career. That was a turning point for me. I went from being an aggressive rider to a more “professional” rider. It carried over to driving cars as well.

The Navy and Marine Corps implement ORM, orders, regulations, and PPE to protect their assets and ultimately protect you. Just like flying, many activities we do on a daily basis have the potential for life threatening injuries. We fly professionally. Decide to carry over that attitude to operating vehicles in our personal lives as well.

Distracted Driving

ENS John Coughlin

There are many laws in place that try to emphasize safe driving habits. In some states it is illegal to talk on the phone and drive, or text and drive, or drink alcohol and drive. These laws are very specific in the things that you cannot do while driving but leave the door open for many other things to be done while driving. You can eat and drive, you can talk to your friends and drive, you can even talk on the phone and drive as long as you are on a “hands free” device, and in some states you are allowed to talk on the phone and drive without a “hands free” device. I feel like I am able to drive and talk on the phone with absolutely no problem at all and I would bet that most people reading this article feel the same way.

There is no doubt, however, that whether you are doing something as severe as driving under the influence of alcohol or as minor as driving while eating a sandwich you are in some form being distracted from the task at hand. My best friend who I grew up with died in a car accident that was a result in distracted driving. He was a passenger in a car on his way to school. Witnesses say that they saw my friend and the driver “horsing around” in the car. I do not know what “horsing around” means in the context of driving but I do know that they had stopped by McDonald’s and were eating and driving and apparently “horsing around.” When I heard that my friend had died I was obviously upset. I was 18 and he was the first of my closest friends to pass away. When I found out that it was due to “horsing around” in the car I was angry but not surprised. My friend had serious ADHD and was constantly goofing off, but I was still mad that it was caused by something that could have so easily been avoided. I do not blame the driver for the accident because I know it was due to the fact that he was distracted. He had put himself in a situation that he thought he could handle, but unfortunately led to the death of my best friend.

I am not trying to say that if you talk on your cellphone and drive then you will someday get in a car accident, I am just trying to emphasize the concept that distraction comes in many forms, legal and illegal, and that just because you are following driving laws, it does not necessarily mean that you are driving safely.

Spice

ENS John Coughlin

There are many rumors that have come about within the past few years about the safety of a semi-legal drug called Spice. There have been issues both in and out of the military that have stemmed from confusion over the facts which define what Spice really is. The fact that Spice is illegal for military personnel to use is not always enough of a reason for a Sailor or Marine to not use it. Regardless of what is written in the UCMJ, there is another important reason to not use Spice and that reason is safety. One of my best friends from high school found out the dangers of Spice the hard way.

One night my friend had decided to try Spice with a group of his friends. He had some experience with other drugs with no repercussions which led to a belief that nothing could go wrong. My friend smoked Spice that night and immediately began to feel differently than he ever felt after smoking marijuana. He became confused and scared and was in a state of mind that he had never before experienced. His confusion became aggression and anger as he tried to fight his friends that were with him. Luckily, the others hadn't smoked as much as he did so they tried to calm him down instead of fighting back. They called his father because they didn't know what else to do. There was something seriously wrong with my friend and they felt like he needed a doctor. When his father showed up the situation went from bad to worse. My friend picked up a kitchen knife and tried to stab his own father. Luckily, his father was able to restrain him enough until the police arrived. My friend was arrested and put in a mental institution. He stayed there for about a month until he was released.

I do not know if what my friend smoked that night was actually Spice or not or if it was laced with another drug, but what I do know is that he thought it was Spice when he tried it. He had no idea the effect it was going to have on his body or mind but it ended up having a life changing effect. Even though Spice is illegal for military members, there are still plenty of civilians that use it, many of whom are uneducated about the possible dangers that are associated with it. Hopefully this article can at least reinforce the notion that drug use, whether legal or illegal, can be extremely dangerous.

Safety First... If there is doubt, then there is no doubt!

