

It's a shocker for rockers

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Head banging increases the risk of head and neck injury, but the effects may be lessened with reduced head and neck motion, head banging to lower tempo songs or to every second beat, and using protective equipment such as neck braces, finds a study in the Christmas issue published on bmj.com today.

What began in 1968 at a Led Zeppelin concert with fans banging their heads on the stage, has developed into a collection of distinctive styles including the up-down, the circular swing, the full body and the side-to-side.

Anecdotal reports of head banging induced injury include hearing loss, stroke and mild traumatic brain injury, but there has been little formal research into head banging.

Declan Patton and Professor Andrew McIntosh from the University of New South Wales, analysed the injury risk from head banging and examined possible ways to protect against these injuries.

The researchers attended hard rock and heavy metal concerts including Motörhead, Ozzy Osbourne and Skid Row, and identified that the up-down style was the most common head banging technique. They constructed a theoretical head banging model of this popular style to examine the effect the range of head and neck motion has on injury severity. A focus group of ten musicians was used to calculate the average tempo of their favourite head banging songs.

The authors found that there is an increasing risk of neck injury beginning at tempos of 130 beats per minute related to the range of motion in the head banging style.

The average head banging song has a tempo of about 146 beats per minute. The authors suggest that at this tempo head banging may cause headaches and dizziness if the range of movement of the head and neck is more than 75°. They report that at higher tempos and greater ranges of motion there is an additional risk of neck injury.

So could someone render themselves unconscious while head banging? Unlikely, say the authors, unless they are banging their head on the stage or connect with someone else's head.

And what of two of the most famous head bangers, Beavis and Butt-head? When head banging at a tempo of 164 beats per minute to "I Wanna be Sedated" the range of motion of Beavis' head and neck is about 45°, say the authors, so he would be unlikely to sustain any injury. But the news for Butt-head may not be so rosy. Preferring to head bang at a range of motion of 75°, he may well experience symptoms of headaches and dizziness.

Luckily, there are a number of possible ways to protect against these injuries, write the authors. These include calling for bands such as AC/DC to play songs such as "Moon River" instead of "Highway to Hell", public awareness campaigns headed by musicians such as Cliff Richard and the labelling of music packaging with anti-head banging warnings.

Source: British Medical Journal

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