

Handling Dental Emergencies

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Accidents to your teeth, lips, cheek, and tongue can happen at any time. If you know what to do when these situations happen, it could be the difference between saving and losing a tooth. There are some simple, everyday precautions that you can perform to help avoid any injuries to your mouth. ALWAYS wear a mouth guard while playing recreational sports. AVOID chewing ice, popcorn kernels, and hard candies; all could lead to a tooth fracture. You should NEVER use your teeth as a vice for opening things, such as bags, pens, and wrappers. Any injury to the teeth or gums can be potentially serious. Seek treatment as soon as possible to avoid the need for more extensive treatment later.

Toothaches- Rinse and floss to ensure the area is free of all food or particles that could be lodged around the tooth. If your mouth is swollen, apply a cold compress to the area. Pain coming from the pulp (the nerves and blood vessels of the tooth) usually results in spontaneous throbbing. It may not need to be stimulated to react. Your bite could feel different, and pain may feel like it radiates to the ear, temple, or cheek. Sometimes, it is hard for you to identify exactly which tooth is the culprit. AVOID putting direct heat in the area. NEVER place aspirin or any pain reliever in the tooth or along the gums. The aspirin could potentially burn the tissue. See your dentist as soon as possible.

Abscess- An abscess may occur when bacteria invades the dental pulp (the nerves and blood vessels of the tooth), causing the pulp to die. The most common cause of an abscess is an untreated cavity, which destroys the tooth's enamel and dentin, allowing bacteria to reach the pulp. Another possible cause of an abscess is the failure to treat an infected dental nerve, which may lead to the breakdown of the bone around the root. The other cause of an abscess is an injury to, or infection of, the gum tissue. The symptoms of an abscess usually start as a constant throbbing pain. The affected area may be sensitive to biting. Eating hot foods may increase the pain. If the infection is left untreated, it may spread to the facial tissues causing cellulites. Sometimes, pus collects at the site of the infection. It will progressively become more painful until it erupts, or until it is surgically drained by a dentist. Diabetics are more prone to the spread of infection; they should seek immediate attention. When an abscess does occur, your dentist will most likely prescribe an antibiotic and take an X-Ray of the tooth to determine if and how the tooth will be restored. Most abscessed teeth can easily be treated with therapy.

Objects Caught Between Teeth-Try to gently remove the object with dental floss. Never use a pin or sharp object to retrieve the object that is stuck. These items can cut your gums or possibly scratch the enamel of another tooth. If you cannot dislodge the object, contact your dentist to schedule an appointment.

Soft tissue injuries-Bleeding can be a result of an injury to the tongue, cheek, gums, and lips. Rinse your mouth with a warm salt water solution. Use a piece of gauze or a

moistened tea bag, and apply pressure to the area if it is bleeding. To help control the pain, apply a cold compress.

Chipped or Broken Teeth- Make sure the area is clean and no food becomes lodged in the tooth. AVOID eating anything hard, crunchy, or sticky. Call and make an appointment as soon as possible. Your dentist will determine what type of restoration will be needed depending on the type of break.

Knocked-Out (Avulsed) Teeth- Retrieve the tooth and rinse the root of the tooth with milk, but DO NOT scrub off any attached tissue. If the tooth will easily (without being forced) go back into the socket, hold it in place with light pressure, and make sure the tooth is facing the right way. If the tooth will not go back into the socket, you can store it in milk or a saline solution until you can get to the dentist. DO NOT put the tooth in disinfectants, bleach, or fruit juice. In all cases, see your dentist as quickly as possible. Knocked-out teeth with the highest chances of being saved are those seen by the dentist and returned to their socket within one hour of being knocked out.

Loose Fillings- Sometimes, a loose filling is actually due to an underlying, painless cavity. Tooth decay can be painless until the decay kills your tooth. The cause of a loose filling can be determined from a dental X-Ray. Delay in having the tooth checked will allow the decay to spread. This can result in a possible need for root canal treatment that could have been avoided.

Lost Crown- If a crown falls off, make an appointment to see your dentist; make sure to bring the crown to the appointment. In the mean time, if the tooth is sensitive, you can place the crown back on temporarily. To do this, swab the inside of the crown with vasoline, denture adhesive, or toothpaste. Seat the crown back on the tooth. DO NOT try to eat with the crown on; it may become dislodged. NEVER use super glue to cement the crown.

Broken Braces Wires- If a wire breaks or comes out of a bracket or band, try placing orthodontic wax on the tip of the wire if it causes discomfort. DO NOT cut the wire yourself; see your dentist as soon as possible.

Loose Brackets or Bands- If a bracket is loose, attempt to reattach it to the tooth by covering it with orthodontic wax. If a band or bracket comes out, DO NOT discard it until the dentist can replace it for you; DO NOT attempt to do this yourself.