

Uh Oh!

People risk breaking their teeth or otherwise injuring their mouths while eating, playing, exercising, and participating in other seemingly harmless activities. It's important to understand what to do in case of a dental emergency so that your tooth can be repaired when you are able to see a dentist.

What are dental emergencies and how can I avoid them?

Dental emergencies can occur when your tooth breaks, cracks, becomes loosened, or is knocked out completely. Sometimes dental crowns come off of teeth. Lips, gums, or cheeks can be cut.

Dental emergencies can be avoided by taking simple precautions, such as wearing a mouthguard during sports activities to prevent teeth from breaking or being knocked out, and avoiding hard foods that may crack or break your teeth—whether you have your natural teeth or you wear dentures. Oral injuries often are painful and should be treated by a dentist as soon as possible.

What should I do if a tooth is knocked out?

If your tooth is knocked out, immediately call a dentist for an emergency appointment. It is important to see your dentist within an hour of when your tooth is knocked out for the best chance of the tooth surviving the trauma. Handle the tooth by the crown (the top), not by the root (the pointed part on the bottom). Touching the root of the tooth can damage cells that are necessary to reattach the tooth to the bone. Gently rinse the tooth in water to remove dirt. Do not scrub the tooth! Place the clean tooth in your mouth between the cheek and gum to keep it moist. It is important not to let the tooth dry out. If it is not possible to



store the tooth in the mouth, wrap the tooth in a clean cloth or gauze and immerse it in milk or saline solution (the solution used for contacts). If a baby tooth is knocked out, the tooth should not be replanted. The patient should be seen as soon as possible to make sure there are no remaining pieces of the tooth.

What should I do if my tooth is pushed out of position?

If your tooth is loosened and pushed out of position, call your dentist right away for an emergency appointment. In the meantime, attempt to reposition it to its normal alignment using very light finger pressure—but don't force it!

How should I handle a chipped or fractured tooth?

There are different types of tooth fractures. Chipped teeth are minor fractures. Moderate fractures include damage to the enamel, tissue, and/or pulp. Severe fractures usually mean that a tooth has been traumatized to the point that it cannot be recovered.

If you fracture a tooth, rinse your mouth with warm water and use an ice pack or cold compress to reduce swelling. Take ibuprofen, not aspirin, for pain. Your dentist can smooth out minor fractures

with a sandpaper disc. Alternatively, restorative procedures may be needed to fix the tooth.

If you wear dentures and a tooth breaks or chips, wear your spare dentures until you can visit your dentist. If you do not have a spare set or cannot get to the dentist's office soon, use cyanoacrylate (heavy-duty, quick-drying "super" glue) to glue the tooth or the piece of the tooth back into place. Remember—this is only a temporary measure until your dentist can properly repair your tooth and should only be used for dentures! Never attempt to glue a natural tooth or part of a natural tooth back into place!

What should I do if the tissue of my mouth is injured?

Injuries inside the mouth include tears or cuts, puncture wounds, and lacerations to the cheek, lips, or tongue. The wound should be cleaned immediately with warm water, and the injured person should be taken directly to an oral surgeon for emergency care. If you can't get to an oral surgeon, the patient should be taken to the hospital.

Bleeding from a tongue laceration can be reduced by pulling the tongue forward and using gauze to place pressure on the wound.

Resources

www.agd.org

At the AGD's Web site, you can search more than 300 oral health topics, post a dental question, sign up for e-newsletters, find an AGD dentist, and more.

1.877.2X.A.YEAR

AGD's toll-free referral number. Call to locate an AGD member dentist in your area.