

PREVENTING TOOTH TRAUMA

Dental emergencies can happen at any time. Oral injuries can be painful and should be treated by your dentist as soon as possible.



What are dental emergencies?

It's considered a dental emergency when your tooth breaks, cracks, becomes loose or is knocked out completely. Sometimes, a dental crown can come off your tooth or your lips, gums or cheeks can be cut. Some emergencies can be avoided if you take simple precautions, such as wearing a mouthguard and helmet while you're playing sports and avoiding hard foods that can crack or break your teeth.

What should I do if my tooth is knocked out?

Your tooth will have the best chance of surviving trauma if you see your dentist within one hour of the incident. Handle your displaced tooth by its crown (the top), not by its root (the pointed part on the bottom). Touching the root of your tooth can damage the cells that are necessary to reattach your tooth to the bone. Gently rinse your tooth in water to remove dirt. Do not scrub!

Then, place your clean tooth in your mouth between your cheek and gum to keep it moist. If it is not possible to store your tooth in your mouth, wrap it in a clean cloth or gauze, and immerse it in milk or saline solution (used for contact lenses). If your child has knocked out a baby tooth, the tooth should not be replanted. However, your child should visit the dentist immediately to ensure no broken pieces of the tooth remain in his or her mouth.

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

If your tooth is loose and pushed out of position, call your dentist right away to schedule an emergency appointment. In the meantime, you can attempt to reposition the tooth to its normal alignment using 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, while damage to your enamel, tissue and/or pulp indicates a moderate fracture. Sustaining a severe fracture usually means that your tooth has been traumatized to the point that it cannot be saved.

If you fracture a tooth, rinse your mouth with warm water and use an ice pack or cold compress to reduce the swelling. Also, take ibuprofen – not aspirin – for pain, and call your dentist to schedule an appointment as soon as possible. Your dentist can smooth minor tooth fractures, but some fractures may require restorative procedures. If you can find the broken tooth fragment, bring it with you to the dentist.

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

Serious injuries inside your mouth include tears or cuts, puncture wounds and lacerations to your cheeks, lips or tongue. Any wound to the inside of your mouth should be cleaned with warm water, and you should contact your dentist immediately. If you can't see your dentist right away, you should go to a hospital.

How can mouthguards protect my mouth?

You should wear a mouthguard whenever there is a chance of your head making contact with other participants or hard surfaces during athletic and recreational activities. A mouthguard is a flexible appliance designed to prevent injuries to your mouth and face, such as split lips, broken teeth and jaw fractures. Wearing a mouthguard also may reduce the severity and incidence of cerebral hemorrhages and concussions and are effective in preventing laceration (cutting) and bruising of the lips and cheeks. Talk with your dentist about obtaining a custom mouthguard.

What other types of protection do I need?

It's important to wear a helmet when participating in sports that involve speed and impact. Properly fitted helmets can prevent major head injuries, as well as facial and neck injuries. Helmets should always fit well and be fastened correctly. For certain sports, other protective gear, such as facemasks and body pads, also should be worn.