

BE PREPARED FOR DENTAL EMERGENCIES

On occasion, I will have a patient who calls for an immediate emergency appointment. They had an accident and broke a tooth. Trauma can cause various size fractures of the teeth. Harder blows to the mouth can cause the teeth to be displaced or to be totally knocked out of the mouth.

If an injury has either traumatized the tooth, or the tooth was chipped or broken, x-rays will be taken to help determine if there are any fractures of the root. Teeth that have fractured roots will need to be stabilized (splinted) to the adjacent teeth for 4 – 6 weeks. If the crown of the tooth is broken, x-rays can also show how close the fracture may be to the nerve of the tooth. When a patient calls with a broken front tooth, it generally can be bonded back to form in that same appointment. Depending on the size of the break, a crown may be necessary to restore the tooth to proper function.

If the tooth has been pushed out of place or loosened, gently try to reposition the tooth and call our office as soon as possible. All soft tissue traumas, such as cuts to the lips, tongue or cheeks should be cleansed. An ice pack will help to control any swelling. Control any bleeding with pressure from a clean cloth. Severe cuts or bleeding may need to be treated in an emergency room.

Should a tooth become totally knocked loose (avulsed), do not try to clean, scrub or disinfect the tooth. Handle it as little as possible. If it is on the ground, try to find the tooth and then rinse it in warm water. If possible, try to gently replace the tooth (after rinsing) back into the bony socket from where it originally was positioned. If not possible, place the tooth between your cheek and gum (just make sure you don't swallow it) or put the tooth in a cup of milk or water. Using a clean cloth or gauze, keep pressure on the bleeding gum and contact our office as soon as possible.

A tooth that is avulsed has the highest long-term success rate for being saved if it is replanted within 15 – 30 minutes. However, an attempt to replant the tooth can still be made after several hours. If the tooth can be replanted, it is generally splinted to the adjacent teeth to stabilize the tooth and minimize its movement. The tooth most likely will require root canal treatment in the near future. After being placed on antibiotics, you should then see your physician for a tetanus shot.

As with all traumatic injuries to the teeth, there is always the possibility that the nerve may die within the tooth. If this were to occur, root canal treatment would be necessary. Periodic x-rays are also taken to follow the healing course of the tooth.

We cannot always avoid injuries, but prevention and preparedness can be your number one aid in treating injuries to your mouth. Also, having a dental office that you can trust and rely upon when an emergency occurs is imperative.

