

What to do in case of a dental injury

Dental and oral injuries include damage to the teeth, lips, gums and tongue. They can result from accidents during playing sport, road traffic accidents, fights and falls. The most common injury is a broken or lost tooth.

Injuries to the teeth

a. Broken (fractured) teeth

The maxillofacial doctor has been able to assess the damage to your teeth by examining your mouth and if necessary taking an x-ray. If the broken tooth has left a sharp edge that might cut in to your tongue or cheek, he may have been able to smooth off the edges using a drill or by placing a temporary filling. Visiting your dentist after the injury will allow them to place a permanent white filling to restore the appearance and carry out any further treatment if needed. If your tooth root is fractured you will need your tooth splinted.

b. Loose/moved (luxation) teeth

If the tooth is loose or has moved from its normal position but is still in the gum, it may need to be moved back into its normal position. This is done by applying some pressure and then using a splint to hold it in place and prevent it from moving again. You do not require antibiotics for these injuries.

c. Fallen out (avulsed) teeth

An avulsed tooth that has completely come out of the gum should be treated as soon as possible. Treatment usually involves reinserting the tooth back into the gum and placing a splint to keep it in position. Success rates of saving these teeth and allowing them to heal well, are higher if the tooth has been kept moist whilst it was out of the mouth and if reinserted within 60 minutes of the injury occurring. You will need a course of antibiotics. Baby teeth are never reinserted.

What is a dental splint?

The most common splint used after dental injury is made of a flexible thin wire and special dental cement. The injured tooth is held secure in its correct position by fixing it to the teeth either side. In the majority of cases it will be left on for 2-4 weeks depending on the type of injury. In some cases of root fracture it may stay on for up to 4 months. The splint can be easily removed by your dentist.

How do I care for my teeth now?

- You will be required to have a soft diet for up to 2 weeks to prevent causing damage to your splint and to prevent the tooth from moving.
- Take regular pain relief tablets for any toothache after the injury.
- Keeping your mouth clean by using a soft tooth brush and cleaning your teeth after every meal will help with the healing and prevent food getting stuck around the splint. Warm, salt mouthwashes (mix a cup of warm, boiled water with a teaspoon of kitchen salt, swill gently around your mouth and then gently spit out) will also help.
- You should use a 0.1% Chlorhexidine mouthwash twice daily for 1 week, which you can get from your chemist or supermarket. ■ Avoid contact sports until your dentist advises that it is safe to resume them.
- Make an urgent appointment to see your own dentist, who will take over the treatment of your teeth.

How are soft tissue injuries treated in the mouth?

After the Maxillofacial doctor has examined your mouth he/she will remove any foreign material such as glass or dirt. He/she will stop any bleeding and stitch any cuts in the gum or lip. These stitches are usually dissolvable and come out themselves in about 2 weeks. You may need a tetanus injection following an injury.

What happens when I get home?

- The lining of the mouth is a sensitive area so injuries can be extremely painful. You may need to take regular pain killing tablets for a few days.
- There may be some swelling which will take 2 or 3 days to settle. Swelling usually gets worse a day after injury and then starts to subside.
- The injured area may be sensitive to hot liquids, spicy and acidic food. A soft diet will be easier to chew. Crisps and crusty bread might scratch and cause pain.
- Keep the mouth clean using warm, salty mouthwashes. These are quite soothing and also encourage the stitches to dissolve. Clean your teeth as usual, but take extra care not to get the toothbrush bristles tangled in any stitches.
- If you have been prescribed antibiotic tablets make sure you complete the full course (usually 5 days).
- You may be given a follow up appointment in clinic to review how the mouth has healed.

Are there any problems to look out for?

Bleeding: there may be a slight trickle of blood for a few hours after treatment is finished. If it starts to bleed when you are at home use a folded, damp clean handkerchief and apply pressure to the bleeding area for at least 15 minutes.

Infection: increasing tenderness in the mouth; an unpleasant taste or discharge and feeling generally unwell/feverish might indicate this. Tooth discolouration/pain: this may mean the nerve in your tooth is damaged and will require further treatment or follow up by your dentist.