



Dental Trauma

Understanding Dental Injuries and What to Do in an Emergency

What Is Dental Trauma?

Dental trauma refers to injuries affecting the teeth, gums, lips, or supporting bone. These injuries can occur suddenly and range from a small chip in a tooth to complete tooth loss.

Prompt treatment is important because early care often improves the chances of saving an injured tooth and preventing long-term complications.

If you experience a dental injury, contact a dentist as soon as possible.

What Causes Dental Trauma?

Dental injuries may result from:

- Falls
- Sports injuries
- Bicycle or motorcycle accidents
- Motor vehicle accidents
- Physical impacts
- Biting hard objects

Children, teenagers, and athletes are among those most commonly affected.

Common Types of Dental Injuries

Dental trauma may include:

- Chipped teeth
- Cracked teeth
- Broken teeth
- Loose teeth
- Teeth pushed out of position
- Teeth completely knocked out (avulsed)

- Injuries to the lips, cheeks, or tongue
- Jaw injuries

Some injuries affect only the enamel, while others involve the root, bone, or surrounding tissues.

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms vary depending on the type of injury.

You may experience:

- Tooth pain
- Bleeding
- Swelling
- Tooth sensitivity
- Difficulty chewing
- A loose tooth
- A missing tooth
- Changes in your bite

Even if there is little pain, a dental injury should still be evaluated.

What Should You Do Immediately?

If a Tooth Is Chipped

- Rinse your mouth with water.
 - Save any broken pieces if possible.
 - Avoid chewing on the injured tooth.
 - Contact your dentist promptly.
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If a Permanent Tooth Is Knocked Out

A knocked-out permanent tooth is a **dental emergency**.

If possible:

- Hold the tooth by the crown (the chewing surface), **not the root**.
- Gently rinse it with clean water if dirty.
- Do not scrub or remove attached tissue.
- If possible, gently place the tooth back into the socket.
- If this is not possible, store the tooth in cold milk or an emergency tooth preservation solution.
- Seek emergency dental care immediately.

The sooner the tooth is replanted, the greater the chance it can be saved.

If a Tooth Becomes Loose

Avoid touching or moving the tooth.

Contact your dentist as soon as possible for evaluation.

If You Have Bleeding

Apply gentle pressure with clean gauze or a clean cloth.

If bleeding is severe or does not stop, seek emergency medical care.

Dental Injuries in Baby Teeth

A knocked-out **baby tooth should not be placed back into the socket**, as this may damage the developing permanent tooth underneath.

Children with dental injuries should be evaluated promptly by a dentist.

How Is Dental Trauma Diagnosed?

Your dentist may perform:

- A clinical examination
- Dental X-rays
- Bite assessment

- Pulp vitality testing
- Three-dimensional imaging (CBCT) when indicated

Some injuries are not immediately visible and require follow-up examinations.

Treatment Options

Treatment depends on the type and severity of the injury.

Possible treatments include:

- Smoothing a chipped edge
- Dental bonding
- Fillings
- Crowns
- Splinting a loose tooth
- Root canal treatment
- Tooth replantation
- Tooth extraction when necessary

Whenever possible, dentists aim to preserve the natural tooth.

Can Dental Trauma Cause Problems Later?

Yes.

Even after successful treatment, an injured tooth may later develop:

- Tooth discoloration
- Root resorption
- Infection
- Pulp damage
- Sensitivity

Regular follow-up appointments allow your dentist to monitor healing.

Preventing Dental Injuries

You can reduce your risk by:

- Wearing a mouthguard during contact sports.
- Wearing a helmet when cycling or participating in activities with a risk of falls.
- Avoiding chewing ice or hard objects.
- Using seat belts while traveling in vehicles.
- Childproofing the home to reduce falls in young children.

Custom-made mouthguards provide the best protection for athletes.

When Should You Seek Emergency Care?

Seek immediate dental care if:

- A permanent tooth is knocked out.
- A tooth is pushed out of position.
- A tooth becomes loose after an injury.
- You have severe tooth pain following trauma.
- A large portion of a tooth breaks.

Seek **emergency medical care immediately** if dental trauma is accompanied by:

- Heavy bleeding that will not stop
 - Difficulty breathing
 - Difficulty swallowing
 - Suspected jaw fracture
 - Loss of consciousness
 - Significant facial swelling
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Common Myths

"If a chipped tooth doesn't hurt, it doesn't need treatment."

False.

Even painless fractures may expose deeper tooth structures or weaken the tooth.

"A knocked-out permanent tooth can never be saved."

False.

If treated quickly and handled properly, many knocked-out teeth can be successfully replanted.

"Baby teeth aren't important because they fall out anyway."

False.

Baby teeth play an important role in chewing, speech, and guiding the eruption of permanent teeth.

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Dental trauma includes injuries to the teeth, gums, and supporting tissues.
 - ✓ A knocked-out permanent tooth is a dental emergency.
 - ✓ Handle a knocked-out tooth by the crown, not the root.
 - ✓ Prompt treatment greatly improves the chances of saving injured teeth.
 - ✓ Mouthguards help prevent many sports-related dental injuries.
 - ✓ All dental injuries should be evaluated by a dental professional, even if pain is minimal.
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