

## Dental emergency procedures

**T**he old adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” applies to many areas of life, including your oral health. Savings in both dollars and discomfort can be gained by taking good care of your teeth on a daily basis: brushing twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste that carries the ADA Seal of Acceptance, cleaning between your teeth daily with floss or interdental cleaners, and seeing your dentist regularly for examinations and professional cleanings.

There are a number of simple precautions you can take to avoid accident and injury to your teeth as well. One way to reduce the chances of damage to your teeth, lips, cheeks and tongue is to wear a mouthguard when playing active sports or engaging in any recreational activity that poses a risk of injury to the mouth. Another is to avoid chewing ice, popcorn kernels and hard candy, all of which can crack a tooth. By cutting tape with scissors—rather than your teeth—you can avoid getting it caught between your teeth.

But accidents do happen, and knowing what to do when one occurs can mean the difference between saving and losing a tooth. Here are a few tips to help you deal with a dental emergency calmly and effectively.

**Broken tooth.** Rinse the mouth with warm water to keep the area clean. Put cold compresses on the face to reduce swelling. Go to the dentist immediately.

**Bitten tongue or lip.** Clean the area gently with a cloth and apply cold compresses to keep swelling down. If bleeding is excessive or doesn't stop in a short time, go to the dentist or a hospital emergency department.

**Toothache.** Rinse the mouth with warm water to clean it out. Use dental floss to remove any food that may be trapped between the teeth. Do

not put aspirin on the aching tooth or gum tissues. See your dentist as soon as possible.

**Objects caught between teeth.** Gently try to remove the object with dental floss. If you're not successful, go to the dentist. Do not try to remove the object with a sharp or pointed instrument.

**Knocked-out tooth.** Hold the tooth by the crown and rinse off the root of the tooth in water if it's dirty. Do not scrub it or remove any attached tissue fragments. If possible, gently insert and hold the tooth in its socket. If that isn't possible, put the tooth in a cup of milk and get to the dentist as quickly as possible. Don't forget to take the tooth with you!

**Possible broken jaw.** Apply cold compresses to control swelling. Go to your dentist or a hospital emergency department immediately.

### WHILE TRAVELING

As upsetting as a dental emergency is when it occurs on your home turf, it can be doubly so if you are out of town. If a dental emergency happens while traveling:

- Look in the Yellow Pages under “dentist” to find the state or local dental society phone number to get a referral.
- Ask the hospital emergency department to recommend a dentist.
- If you are out of the country, contact the U.S. Consulate or ask hotel personnel to refer you to a dentist.

For more information about oral health, visit the American Dental Association's Web site, “[www.ada.org](http://www.ada.org)”. ■

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