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How to Deal with Dental Emergencies

As the school year begins each year, I see an increase in the number of dental emergencies. Often I am asked about the best course of action in handling such emergencies as a tooth being knocked out or a jaw injury that causes damage to the jaw or temporomandibular joint (TMJ). The temptation to remedy such mishaps without proper medical attention can make matters much worse. A blow to the jaw which causes significant pain or numbness should be attended to quickly by a dental or medical physician to eliminate the possibility of further complications.

Most injuries occur as a result of sports related mishaps which can be avoided by wearing a mouth guard.

Custom mouth guards can be worn quite comfortably and can be constructed by your dentist to specifically fit your teeth. These mouth guards are worth their weight in gold whenever a contact sport is involved.

I encourage anyone with questions regarding these mouth guards to ask their dentist about the comfort and ease of wearing such a small and possibly very helpful device.

Below are some basic guidelines in dealing with everyday dental emergencies.

Post these on the inside of your medicine cabinet or near a phone for quick and easy referral.

Knocked-Out Tooth:

Hold the tooth by the crown and not the root. Rinse off the root of the tooth with milk or *saline if it is dirty. DO NOT scrub the root or remove any attached tissue fragments. If it is possible, gently insert and hold the tooth in its socket. If this is not possible, put the tooth in a cup of milk or water and get to the dentist as quickly as possible. Do not forget to take the tooth with you!

Broken Tooth:

Rinse your mouth with warm water to keep the area clean. Put cold compresses on your 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 the swelling down. If bleeding does not stop, go to a hospital emergency room.

Objects Caught Between Teeth:

Gently try to remove the object with dental floss. If you are not successful, go to the dentist. Do not try to remove the object with a sharp or pointed instrument.

Toothache:

Rinse your 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 gums. See your dentist as soon as possible.

Possible broken jaw:

Do not move the jaw. Secure the jaw in place by tying a handkerchief, necktie, or towel around the jaw and over the top of the head. If there is swelling, apply cold compresses to the area of swelling. Go to the dentist or a hospital emergency room immediately.

Aspirin Warning: Bleeding can increase if aspirin is taken orally prior to or following a dental emergency and can cause chemical burns if applied directly to gums

Water Warning: Water or tap-water is not the best choice of liquids for cleaning or transport of a knocked out tooth. Tap-water can inhibit the healing of a knocked out tooth that has been repositioned or replaced in its socket.

*Saline: As a helpful tool, I highly recommend obtaining some water that is chemically balanced (saline) to protect the tooth for transport to the dentist. This can be purchased in small quantities from a local pharmacy, or local optometrist as an eye wash liquid. Keep this saline solution in your medicine cabinet to be used as both rinse and transport liquid for the tooth. Buy this and keep it on hand for this unpleasant emergency, should it ever happen.