

Handling Dental Emergencies

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Dental emergencies can be an unexpected interruption in our already busy lives. The best way to avoid most dental emergencies is by using proper dental hygiene and seeing the dentist every six months for a cleaning and examination. However, some emergencies cannot be avoided. Any dental emergency like an injury to the teeth or gums can be potentially serious and should not be ignored. You should see a dentist as soon as possible. Ignoring a dental problem can increase the risk of permanent damage as well as the need for more extensive and expensive treatment down the road. Here's a summary of what to do for some common dental problems:

- **Toothaches.** First, thoroughly rinse your mouth with warm water. Use dental floss to remove any lodged or impacted food. If your mouth is swollen, apply a cold compress to the outside of your mouth or cheek. **Never** put aspirin or any other painkiller against the gums near the aching tooth because it may burn the gum tissue.
- **Chipped or broken teeth.** Save any pieces. Rinse the mouth using warm water; rinse any broken pieces. If there's bleeding, apply a piece of gauze to the area until the bleeding stops. Apply a cold compress to the outside of the mouth, cheek, or lip near the broken/chipped tooth to keep any swelling down and relieve pain.
- **Knocked-out tooth.** Retrieve the tooth, hold it by the crown (the part that is usually exposed in the mouth), and rinse off the root with water if it's dirty. Do not scrub it or remove any attached tissue fragments. If possible, try to put the tooth back in place. Make sure it's facing the right way. Never force it into the socket. If it's not possible to reinsert the tooth in the socket, put the tooth in a small container of milk or a product containing cell growth medium, such as Save-a-Tooth. Knocked out teeth with the highest chances of being saved are those seen by a dentist and returned to their socket within 1 hour of being knocked out.
- **Extruded (partially dislodged) tooth.** See the dentist right away. Until you reach your dentist's office, to relieve pain, apply a cold compress to the outside of the mouth or cheek in the affected area. Take an over-the-counter pain reliever if needed.
- **Objects caught between teeth.** First, try using dental floss to very gently and carefully remove the object. If you can't get the object out, see the dentist. Never use a pin or other sharp object to poke at the stuck object. These instruments can cut your gums or push the object deeper into your gum tissues.
- **Lost filling.** As a temporary measure, stick a piece of sugarless gum into the cavity or use an over-the-counter dental cement.
- **Lost crown.** If the crown falls off, make an appointment to see the dentist as soon as possible and bring the crown with you. If you can't get to the dentist right away and the tooth is causing pain, use a cotton swab to apply a little clove oil to the sensitive area (clove oil can be purchased at your local drug store or in the spice aisle of your grocery store). If possible, slip the crown back over the tooth. Before doing so, coat the inner surface with an over-the-counter dental cement or denture adhesive, to help hold the crown in place. **Never** use super glue!
- **Abscess.** Abscesses are infections that occur around the root of a tooth or in the space between the teeth and gums. Abscesses are a serious condition that can damage tissue and surrounding teeth, with the infection possibly spreading to other parts of the body if left untreated. To ease the pain and draw the pus toward the surface, try rinsing your mouth with a mild salt water solution (1/2 teaspoon of table salt in 8 ounces of water).
- **Soft-tissue injuries.** Injuries to the soft tissues, which include the tongue, cheeks, gums, and lips, can result in bleeding. To control the bleeding, here's what to do:
 1. Rinse your mouth with a mild salt-water solution (1/2 teaspoon of table salt in 8 ounces of water).
 2. Use a moistened piece of gauze or tea bag to apply pressure to the bleeding site. Hold in place for 15 to 20 minutes.
 3. To both control bleeding and relieve pain, hold a cold compress to the outside of the mouth or cheek in the affected area for 5 to 10 minutes.
 4. If the bleeding doesn't stop, see the dentist right away or go to a hospital emergency room. Continue to apply pressure on the bleeding site with the gauze until you can be seen and treated.

This article has been provided as a community service. Dr. Cheyn Gunnerson has been serving the dental needs of the community since 1996. He graduated from Oregon Health Sciences University with a degree in Dental Medicine. He is currently involved in the Payson Civic Chorale where he sings and accompanies the choir on the piano and organ. He also enjoys serving in the Provo Temple as one of the temple organists. For more information on what he can do to help you keep your teeth healthy for a lifetime visit his website at www.excellencebychoice.net or call his office at 801-465-3233 for an appointment.