

Following an Accident

An accident that involves injury to the teeth, mouth and face are particularly common in childhood. Just over one third of all five year olds will have suffered an injury to their first (primary) teeth. By 12 years old, 20-30 per cent of children will have suffered injuries to their teeth. Boys are one third more likely to be affected.

Rapid action by parents, carers and teachers can save a child's teeth, so it is important to know what to do if an accident should happen. With some injuries there is a much better chance of good recovery if treatment is given immediately, rather than waiting for professional assistance (see below). Any trauma or injury to first teeth can effect the development of the second teeth. Children who have had injuries to first teeth need to be regularly monitored by their dentist.

Injuries to the teeth can include: -

- A fracture of the tooth or root. The fracture can go through enamel only, through the enamel into the dentine (sensitive yellow tissue under the enamel), or into the pulp in the middle of a tooth (nerve and blood vessels).
- Injury to the tissues that hold the tooth in place (periodontal ligament)
- The tooth can be loosened or knocked out of its socket completely.
- Severe injuries may include head injury and fractures of the jaw and facial bones. If severe injury is suspected, or there has been any period of loss of consciousness, the patient should be taken to hospital immediately.

Urgent action after injury to baby teeth:

- Calm the child down. Children will usually be very distressed.
- Wash the blood away with plenty of cold water.
- Use damp gauze, cotton, clean cloth or tissue to stop the bleeding by pressing on any wound including gums, tongue, lips and cheeks.
- Try to locate any lost teeth or tooth fragments. It is important to show these to the dental /medical staff to eliminate the risk that they have been inhaled.
- Do not replace baby teeth in the mouth. Infections that may occur after replacement of a primary or baby tooth could effect the development of second teeth.

Urgent action after injury to permanent teeth:

- Remain calm and reassure the victim
- Wash the areas if injury with plenty of water.
- Apply a cold compress of damp cotton, gauze, clean cloth or tissue, with pressure, for 5 minutes to stop the bleeding.
- Locate any pieces of broken tooth and put the fragments in water. These may be able to be used to repair the broken tooth with special dental adhesive and filling material.
- If a whole tooth has been knocked out (avulsed) pick up the tooth by the crown (top). Do not touch or scrub the root. If it has been soiled, it can be gently washed

for about 10 seconds under a cool tap. Hold the tooth by the crown and gently insert it into its socket, then ask the casualty to bite on a damp cloth while they are taken to a dentist.

- If it is not possible to insert the tooth, put it in some milk, or ask the victim to place the tooth between the teeth and cheek. Seek immediate dental assistance.

Long - term follow up

Patients who have had an accident to either first or second teeth need to be monitored by a dentist. Teeth may appear fine at first, but some teeth can show reaction to damage months, or even years, after the event. A dentist will be able to advise on the necessary follow-up period