

Dental Trauma

If your child has a tooth broken or knocked out because of an injury, go to the dentist as soon as possible. Take the tooth or tooth fragment with you, if possible. Some simple steps can help to protect your child from dental injuries.

What is dental trauma?

Injuries causing damage to the teeth and the tissues around the teeth are common in toddlers, children, and teens. Prompt action can save a lost or broken tooth. It is essential to see the dentist as soon as possible.

What does it look like?

- Injuries to the teeth or mouth are usually obvious. Something happens to chip or break a tooth, to loosen a tooth, or to knock the tooth out entirely. The injury may cause a lot of pain, often with bleeding.
- Sometimes dental injuries happen as part of more serious trauma, such as a car accident or a blow to the head.

What causes dental trauma?

The main causes of dental injuries vary with age:

- Toddlers: Most commonly injured in falls.
- School-aged children: Most commonly injured in bicycle or playground accidents.
- Teenagers: Frequent causes include sports injuries, car accidents, and fights.

Can dental injuries be prevented?

- Children and teens participating in contact sports (especially football) should wear a mouth guard.
- Front teeth that protrude (stick out) are more easily harmed. Discuss this situation with your child's dentist or orthodontist, who may suggest some protective measures.
- In the car, make sure your child always wears a seatbelt. Babies and toddlers should always ride in car seats.
- Childproof your home to remove possible causes of falls, such as wires or other obstructions that could cause your child to trip and fall.

What are some possible complications of dental trauma?

- Loss of teeth.
- Change of color of teeth.
- Injuries to primary ("baby") teeth can cause damage to the developing permanent tooth underneath.

How is dental trauma treated?

If your child has a primary (baby) tooth knocked out:

- Call your dentist's office. Even though it's a primary tooth, the dentist may want to check for possible damage to the underlying permanent tooth. Usually, it's not necessary to replace lost primary teeth.

If your child has a permanent tooth knocked out:

- Find the tooth.
- Rinse the tooth. Do not scrub it, and do not touch the root. After plugging the sink, hold the tooth by the crown (the biting surface) and rinse it under running water.
- Gently place the tooth back in the socket. Don't worry if it doesn't go all the way back in. If it isn't possible to put the tooth back in, put it in a clean container with cold milk.
- Go to the dentist immediately. Have your child hold the tooth in place with a finger if possible.

If your child has a chipped or fractured tooth:

- Rinse the mouth with water.
- Go to the dentist immediately. If you can find the tooth fragment, take it with you.

What will the dentist do?

- If possible, the dentist will try to replace or repair the missing or fractured tooth. Give the dentist as much information as possible about how your child's injury occurred. Treatment decisions will depend on how much damage the injury did to the teeth, gums, and jaw.

When should I call your office?

If your child has an injury to the teeth or mouth, call or visit your dentist's office.