

Helpful Hints for Handling a Dental Emergency

What do you do when you cut your finger, burn your arm or sprain your ankle? Easy, you use common sense, apply basic first aid and consult your physician or local hospital emergency room. But, what do you do when you have a dental emergency?

While dental emergencies occur far less often than other health-related traumas, you should be prepared to handle such a situation.

The following information explains how to handle some common dental emergencies.

- **Food/Objects Caught Between Teeth** – Use dental floss to try gently removing the object. If this is not successful, consult your dentist.
- **Cut/Bitten Tongue or Lip** – Clean the area with a cloth. Then, apply a cold compress to reduce the swelling. If the affected area continues to bleed or swell, see your local emergency room physician immediately.
- **Toothache** – When you experience a toothache, you should rinse your mouth with warm water and check to make sure that food or other objects have not become lodged in the area surrounding the affected tooth. Then, you should consult your dentist for further treatment. Also, be sure not to rub aspirin or painkillers on the area surrounding the toothache as this can result in a burn on the mouth.
- **Broken Tooth** – You should rinse your mouth with warm water to clean the area surrounding the affected tooth. Next, apply a cold compress to reduce the swelling and contact your dentist immediately.
- **Knocked-Out Tooth** – First, retrieve the tooth, hold it by the crown and rinse the root of the tooth. Do not scrub the tooth or remove any attached tissue. If possible, place the tooth back in its socket. If not, place the tooth in a container of milk or water and immediately see your dentist. Remember that time is of the essence. The longer your tooth is out of the socket, the less chance there will be that it will be saved.

Also remember, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Here are some tips to help you avoid dental emergencies.

- Use seatbelts and car seats when traveling in an automobile, airplane or train.
- Wear appropriate safety equipment for sports, exercise and other activities (mouth guard, helmet, etc.).
- Use safety items in your home to avoid falls and other accidents (closet latches, corner guards, safety gates, etc.).

You should also keep your dentist's contact information readily available. Then if a problem arises, you can call for a phone consultation. Should you experience a dental emergency away from home, contact the local emergency room or state dental society for a referral.