



Game plan: Time Is Critical To Save Knocked-Out Teeth

By Linda Ann Chomin

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Jayce Bennert was playing catch in the yard with his sister when the hard ball knocked out the 9-year-old boy's front tooth. Quick thinking by his father helped save one of Jayce's permanent teeth. After Jayce ran into the house screaming Gregory ran out to find the tooth then immediately called the family dentist who told him to put the tooth in milk to prevent the cells on the root from dying.

Having a game plan when a tooth is knocked out can mean the difference between a healthy tooth or a lifetime of dental problems, according to Dr. Thomas Vokal of Endodontic Associates in Rochester. A replanted tooth can last for years. Technology in the field of dentistry and endodontics has advanced to include not only equipment, but techniques to save natural teeth. Endodontists receive specialized training after dental school to use digital imaging, microscopes and miniaturized dental instruments to diagnose and treat problems dealing with the inside of the tooth.

"Time is critical in keeping that tooth alive," said Dr. Thomas Vokal, an endodontist or root canal specialist. "Time management in the first hour or half-hour is very important to maintaining the health or vitality of cells of the tooth. Handle the crown. The root should not be handled to keep the cells on the root alive. If replanted within first 15 minutes those cells will stay alive. If the outside of the tooth dies, the body may reject it. That's why it's important in the middle of soccer or football to put the tooth into a transport solution. One that's common in First Aid kits is Save a Tooth, a solution to keep the outside surface of the tooth alive until you can see a dentist. Milk can work too. If not milk, your own saliva. Gently rinse off the tooth and put in a solution or milk then see a dentist or endodontist immediately. A root canal will be needed because the inside will die."

Vokal suggests everyone who plays sports should wear a mouth guard.

"They need protection with a mouth guard, anyone in any kind of contact sports, see a dentist for a fitted mouth guard," said Vokal. "Prevention is key for preventing trauma."

"We've seen several from baseball over the summer. They take a baseball directly to face. The initial injury they also have a lot of soft tissue and facial injury. Parents are very concerned about the pain and discomfort, and losing a tooth at that age they're looking at implants and bridges, but they can't get those done until they're finished growing around 18- to 21-years old. There's lifelong dental treatment if a tooth is lost."

Vokal says he sees more children under age 16 losing teeth to accidents around the home than playing sports. While Vokal makes sure his 8-year-old son Jonathan wears a mouth guard while playing hockey, he has less control at home.

"Unfortunately at home playing boys will be boys. You can't prevent all accidents. That's why you need to know the proper steps to take," said Vokal. "When Jayce's accident happened another dentist

reimplanted the tooth. We saw him a week later. That's usually when the root canal is done. The problem at that age is the root has not completely developed."

New materials allow an endodontist to fill the tooth and stimulate healing at end of root. Gregory Bennert says he's amazed with the results. The drive from their home in Lakeport near Port Huron to Rochester was worth saving his son's tooth.

"Jayce's accident happened in May. You can't tell. It's rock solid," said Gregory Bennert. "We went last Tuesday to Dr. Vokal for a checkup and everything's taking. The body naturally reattaches itself to the tooth."