



Timely Tricks Save Knocked-Out Teeth

April 21, 2006

If you lose a tooth while playing sports or due to any other cause, quick and proper action can still help save it, according to experts at the American Association of Endodontists (AAE).

Here's what you need to do:

Pick up the tooth by the crown (chewing surface), not by the root. Handle the tooth carefully by the crown, avoiding the tooth opening, to help minimize injury to the root.

If the tooth is dirty, gently rinse it with a spray of water. Don't use soap or chemicals, scrub or dry the tooth, or wrap it in a tissue or cloth.

If possible, immediately reposition the tooth in the socket. The sooner the tooth is replaced in the socket, the better its chance of being saved. To reinsert the tooth, carefully push the tooth into the socket, or position the tooth above the socket and close the mouth slowly. Hold the tooth in place with your fingers or be gently biting down on it.

Keep the tooth moist at all times. Don't allow it to dry out. If you can't place it back in the socket, put it in a glass of milk or in your mouth next to the cheek. If neither of these choices is practical, put the tooth in water, with a pinch of salt.

See an endodontist within 30 minutes. An endodontist is dentist who specializes in traumatic tooth injuries. Seeking professional help within 30 minutes significantly improves the likelihood that the tooth can be successfully re-implanted.

While it's possible to save a tooth that's been knocked out, prevention is the best medicine, the experts said. Athletes should wear proper mouth or face protection.

"The high-impact nature of most sports means that teeth can be knocked out at almost any time," AAE president John S. Olmsted said in a prepared statement. "But with the proper preventive measures and quick thinking, an athlete's natural teeth can be saved to last a lifetime."

More information

The American Dental Association has more about mouthguards (www.ada.org).