



Endodontists Urge Mouth Guard Use To Prevent Knocked-Out Teeth In Sports - What To Do If A Tooth Goes Flying

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Thousands of dollars are spent each year on shin guards, wrist pads, athletic cups and other sports gear to protect athletes from harm. But with the weather warming for spring, one of the most important body parts often remains exposed to traumatic injury: the mouth. In support of National Facial Protection Month, the American Association of Endodontists (AAE) urges all athletic directors, coaches and parents to enforce mouth guard use and facial protection during sports to prevent knocked out, or avulsed, teeth.

Mouth guards prevent an estimated 20,000 oral injuries in the U.S. each year, according to the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association. While most people assume that collision sports such as football and ice hockey pose the highest risks for dental trauma, data from the Journal of Pediatric Care show that soccer players now have the greatest risk of orofacial injuries, suffering them at three times the rate of football players, while basketball players have double the risk of football and ice hockey players. The National Federation of State High School Associations estimates that more than seven million high school athletes may suffer from head-to-head contact, falls, contact from elbows, hands and arms, and flying equipment, underlining the importance of mouth protection.

“It is imperative that all student athletes be fitted for a custom mouth guard by their family dentist before taking the field,” says John S. Olmsted, D.D.S., M.S., AAE president. “Just as helmets help protect an athlete’s head from trauma, mouth guards are essential to protect teeth from serious injury.”

Even with proper mouth and face protection, a tooth can still get knocked out during sports. But a tooth that’s out isn’t necessarily gone: with quick and proper action, many avulsed teeth can be successfully replanted to last for years. To maximize the chance of success, an endodontist should be consulted soon after the tooth is knocked out. Endodontists are dentists with expertise in treating traumatic tooth injuries. They specialize in root canal therapy, which often is needed to treat a knocked-out tooth, and can save many teeth that were once considered hopeless. Accustomed to emergencies, endodontists are often flexible in accommodating sudden treatment requests.

Saving Your Tooth If It Gets Knocked Out

When teeth do get knocked out, endodontic experts say the key is to act quickly, yet calmly, and follow these five simple steps to save the tooth:

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

2 If the tooth is dirty, gently rinse it with a spray of water. Take care not to handle the root surface. Don't use soap or chemicals, scrub or dry the tooth, or wrap it in a tissue or cloth.

3 Reposition the tooth in the socket immediately, if possible. The sooner the tooth is replaced, the greater its chance of survival. To reinsert, 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 fingers or by gently biting down on it.

4 Keep the tooth moist at all times. The tooth must not be left outside the mouth to dry. If it can't be replaced in the socket, put it in a glass of milk or in the mouth next to the cheek. If none of these is practical, use water, preferably with a pinch of salt.

5 See an endodontist within 30 minutes. A tooth can sometimes be saved even if it's been outside the mouth for an hour or more. But seeking professional help within 30 minutes significantly improves the odds of successful reimplantation.

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

For more information about avulsed teeth, or to locate an endodontist in your area, visit <http://www.rootcanalspecialists.org>.

American Association of Endodontists

The American Association of Endodontists, headquartered in Chicago, represents more than 6,600 members worldwide, including approximately 95 percent of all eligible endodontists in the United States. The Association, founded in 1943, is dedicated to excellence in the art and science of endodontics and to the highest standard of patient care. The Association inspires its members to pursue professional advancement and personal fulfillment through education, research, advocacy, leadership, communication and service. For more information, visit the AAE Web site at <http://www.aae.org>.