



Get Back in the Game

For athletes with dental trauma, early intervention by an endodontist could mean the difference between saving a tooth or losing it.



Staying active is a key part of staying healthy, and protective equipment like mouthguards are essential for keeping teeth safe. But accidents can still happen, and when they involve teeth, Craig Hirschberg, D.D.S., notes that a good option might be to head straight for the nearest endodontist.

“Injuries involving the head trauma, severe lacerations, broken jaws, or other bone fractures would necessitate a trip to the emergency department and should be treated immediately, of course,” says Dr. Hirschberg, president of the American Association of Endodontists (AAE). But when it comes to saving your precious teeth, not every emergency room has dental staff on hand. If you think that your injury is limited to the teeth, or you have been stabilized in the ER but require additional dental trauma care, a good option is to visit AAE’s website to find a list of endodontists—dentists specially trained to deal with traumatic tooth injuries and pain—nearby.

There is a wide range of dental injuries that can result from trauma. Sometimes, the tooth stays intact, but the bone surrounding the tooth is injured. Other categories of injuries can range from a mild tooth chip to the crown (the visible part of the tooth) to the tooth being displaced laterally, pushed deeper into the socket or completely knocked out of the jaw. If the latter happens, “first try putting the tooth back in the socket immediately or, if that isn’t possible, into a container of milk—the colder, the better, and seek an endodontist or dentist ASAP,” says Dr. Hirschberg. “We’re trying to keep the cells on the surface of the tooth alive so it can properly reattach to the bone. Ideally, we want the tooth back in the jaw within the hour. Sooner is better!”

Preventative Measures

Are certain athletes more prone than others to enduring dental trauma? From skateboarders to basketball players and even surfers, “I’ve treated patients who have injured teeth participating in a wide variety of sports,” says Dr. Hirschberg, who enjoys general cardio, hiking, swimming, and kayaking himself. “Any contact sport that risks a faceplant or getting an elbow in the face could cause a dental injury. It need not be a sport perceived as extreme or high risk. One of the most complicated trauma cases I ever treated was for a patient whose teeth were injured when a machine malfunctioned during a Pilates session.”

Early action can mean the difference between saving a tooth and losing it. Many patients sustaining serious dental trauma may require tooth repositioning and stabilization and root canal treatment, either immediately or after a period of monitoring (depending upon the injury). An endodontist, as a specialist in saving teeth, is an excellent provider for this care and should be seen as soon as possible.

“Not every tooth that is displaced will require a root canal,” says Dr. Hirschberg. But because it’s a distinct possibility, prompt attention by an endodontist will increase the likelihood of a positive long-term outcome. The goal, he notes, is for the tooth to be healthy and fully functional and to save your smile for the next season, match, or game.



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