
Dental emergencies

This fact sheet explains what to do when a dental emergency occurs. Dental emergencies include:

- *toothache*
- *a knocked out tooth*
- *chips, fractures and cracks*
- *bitten lips or cheeks*
- *abscesses and swelling*
- *soft tissue trauma and bleeding, and*
- *jaw pain.*

Toothache

- For a toothache, first rinse the mouth with warm water to remove debris.
- If swelling is present, place a cold compress to the outside of the cheek (do not use heat).
- Take paracetamol rather than aspirin, as aspirin thins the blood.
- Do not place aspirin on the gum or aching tooth. This causes soft tissue to burn.
- Always seek dental treatment as soon as possible.

Knocked out tooth

If a permanent tooth is knocked out, it can be saved but immediate action is required. Follow these steps:

- Remain calm and find the tooth.
- Handle the top of the tooth only (the crown). Never hold the tooth by its roots.
- Do not scrape, rub or remove any tissue fragments from the tooth.
- Make sure the tooth is clean. If the tooth is dirty, rinse it in milk or very briefly in water. Alternatively, the owner can gently suck the tooth although this is not recommended for young children or adults who are unconscious, in shock or not fully calm and cooperative.
- Immediately replant the tooth in the socket and hold tooth in place.

- If unable to replant the tooth, keep it moist by immersing it in milk (not water), sealing it in plastic wrap, or placing it in the owner's mouth next to the cheek (if the owner is able).
- Do not let the tooth dry out.
- Seek immediate dental care (time is critical).

If a baby tooth is knocked out, do not attempt to replace it. Re-implanting a knocked out baby tooth could cause damage to the developing adult tooth. Seek prompt dental care so any trauma to the lips and gums and associated pain can be managed.

Chips, fractures and cracks

If a tooth chip or fracture is only minimal and there is no soft tissue trauma and no pain, do not panic. Seek dental advice within 24 hours.

If the tooth chip or fracture is large, seek dental advice as soon as possible. Look for any sign of 'pink' as this indicates the nerve is exposed. If the nerve is exposed, seek immediate dental treatment. Delaying treatment may mean the tooth will be unable to be saved.

Bitten lips or cheeks

A lip or cheek can be bitten during eating, as a result of a fall or after local anaesthetic. If the numb area is sucked, bitten or rubbed, it can be damaged without the patient realising it. The traumatised area often looks like an unsightly chemical burn and may be misdiagnosed as such. When feeling returns to the area, it may be very sore. Swelling and infection may also occur. Treat a bitten lip or cheek with warm, salty mouth rinses to promote healing. Seek advice from a dental professional if an infection occurs.

Abscesses and swelling

Dental abscesses are pus-filled swellings caused by infection inside a tooth, infection of the gum (common with periodontitis) and/or trauma to the tooth. Abscesses are often painful, but not always. Dental abscesses can cause facial swelling and/or enlarged lymph glands. In rare cases, dental abscesses can cause more widespread infection and may be life threatening. For dental abscesses:

- Control moderate pain with over-the-counter pain medication. Take this in the usual way and do not apply the medication to the abscess itself.
- Use cold compresses to help control swelling.
- A dental professional or doctor may prescribe antibiotics to reduce infection, however, antibiotics will not remove the source of infection.
- Seek prompt dental treatment. An abscess will not heal itself, and antibiotics will not fix the problem.

Soft tissue trauma and bleeding

Trauma and bleeding to the lip, cheek or gums should be treated as follows:

- Apply a clean bandage or folded handkerchief to the wound and apply firm pressure.
- Sit down and maintain the pressure for at least ten minutes. Don't lie down flat.
- If the bleeding cannot be controlled, seek immediate medical attention.
- Apply a cold compress to relieve swelling and pain.
- Seek dental or medical advice.
- Use warm, salty mouth rinses until the wound has healed to reduce the risk of infection.

Jaw pain

If you are having trouble eating or opening your mouth due to jaw pain, or experience jaw pain on waking, seek medical or dental care. It is important for a dental professional or doctor to diagnose the source of the jaw pain.

To alleviate jaw pain in the short term, apply a cold compress or take anti-inflammatory medication.

For more information

- Contact your dental professional
- Visit www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth
- Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) for confidential health advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Email oral_health@health.qld.gov.au.

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