

The Truth About Tooth Trauma

by Catherine M. Quas, DMD and the team at Bluefish Dental & Orthodontics

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Along with chilly weather and candy-coated holidays, the autumn season generally brings an increase in the number of kids that visit their dentist with sports-related dental trauma. Accidents happen--that is for sure--even with all of the right precautions in place. Wearing a mouth guard while playing football is essential but it won't protect your child's teeth from a flying helmet after the game is over and the players are messing around.

According to the International Association of Dental Traumatology, up to half of all children will experience dental injury at some point in their youth. If you are the parent of a child between the ages of eight to 12 you may have experienced this firsthand, as kids in this age group are the most likely to be injured. Regardless of the age of your child, it is a good idea for every parent to be prepared to handle a dental emergency both at home and on the field.



Before Treatment: Chipped and broken teeth are common dental traumas, especially for youth between the ages of eight and 12.

If a permanent tooth is chipped or broken:

- If possible, gather all the pieces of the tooth
- Rinse the mouth with warm water
- Apply a cold compress to the injured area (reduces swelling and lessens pain)
- See your dentist immediately

If a permanent tooth is knocked out there is the possibility that it can be re-implanted successfully if handled quickly and correctly:

- Handle the tooth only by the crown
- Do not let the tooth dry out
- Do not worry about dirt or blood, and do not scrub the tooth as this can remove cells from the surface of the tooth.



After Treatment: Knowing what to do in a dental emergency can help quickly restore your child's smile.

- If possible, reinsert the tooth in the socket. Have your child bite down on a piece of gauze to hold the tooth in place until you reach the dentist or emergency room.
- If the tooth cannot be reinserted in the socket place it in milk. The chemical makeup of milk is compatible with teeth and will help keep the cells in the tooth alive. Do not place the tooth in water as the chlorine in water may damage the tooth root.
- If milk is not available the next best option is to place the tooth inside the mouth between the cheek and lower gum.
- See a dentist or visit the emergency room within thirty minutes after the trauma occurs for the best chance of successfully re-implanting the tooth.

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The Truth About Tooth Trauma, *continued*

Injuries to baby teeth are handled differently than injuries to the permanent teeth found in older children:

- Baby teeth that are knocked out cannot be replaced and do not need to be placed back in the socket.
- If there is bleeding, apply a cold compress to the injury site and apply pressure. In small children the frenum (small fold of tissue inside the upper lip) tears easily and can bleed quite a bit. However, this area also heals very quickly.
- A popsicle can help reduce swelling and lessen pain.
- Contact your dentist as soon as possible to discuss your child's injury and treatment.

First and foremost is the health of the child, if a jaw or head injury is suspected, an emergency room visit is warranted.

In addition to taking normal precautions such as always wearing a seatbelt and making sure your child is using an appropriate child seat in the car, check your home regularly for potential trip and fall hazards. Dental trauma for younger children is most likely to occur from falls during the toddler years, so it is important to childproof your home (adding cushioning to sharp edges such as coffee tables, etc.).

A mouth guard for older children who participate in sports is highly recommended. Athletes who do not wear a mouth guard are 60 times more likely to sustain dental trauma than those who do. Some dentists are happy to create custom mouth guards at no charge to help prevent dental trauma--check with your dentist to see if this is possible for your child. And don't hesitate to ask your dentist any questions that you might have about the prevention and care of dental traumas, or any other issue related to optimal oral health care for your children.

About Dr. Quas and Bluefish: Dr. Catherine M. Quas founded Bluefish Dental & Orthodontics in Bend, OR in 2004 after completing two residencies, one in pediatric dentistry and the other in orthodontics at the UCLA School of Dental Medicine. In just eight years she has expanded her practice to include a Redmond location and two additional dentists have joined the practice, Dr. John Frachella and Dr. Susan Armstrong. While the diverse training of the practitioners allows them to provide an expansive scope of services to patients, all three share the common goal of improving the dental and oral health of children in Central Oregon. The Bluefish team, which includes a staff of 14, serves children and families throughout the region.



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