

"Avulsed Teeth"

What every Coach, Educator, School Nurse, Parent, and Patient needs to know about "Knocked Out Teeth" Or my opinions after three decades of experience, practice, research, and teaching

"Avulsed" is the fancy medical term for a tooth that has been "knocked out". Quick quiz, what sport is most likely to cause injury to the teeth? If you guessed football, the answer was basketball, and we have already seen injuries this year! Basketball is the sport that causes the most injuries to teeth in both male and female athletes, yet there is no UIL rule requiring wearing of a "football" type of mouth piece for all sports!

What do you do when a tooth is "Knocked Out"? Luckily, some dentists can treat this effectively with your help. If the dentist is properly informed, in most instances, the tooth can be successfully reimplanted, with no side effects!

We successfully re-implanted a "Knocked Out" tooth more than 30 years ago. The tooth is still in place with no signs of damage, as are many other teeth we have re-implanted over the years. We have also shared this technique with dentists and other professionals literally from all over the world. However, we still hear horror stories of how avulsed teeth are treated due to lack of knowledge or lack of training by dental professionals. It is important for every coach, parent, school nurse, or professional who may need to deal with a lost tooth to have the basic knowledge of how these teeth CAN POSSIBLY BE treated successfully.

The "common wisdom" of thirty years ago dictated that any tooth that was "knocked out" had to be root canal treated before being reimplanted. Unfortunately, root canal treatment of avulsed teeth virtually assures that the tooth will darken and become unsightly, and may also destroy the tooth's ability to reattach properly to the bone. More unfortunately, this method of treatment is still in use. This may lead to eventual rejection by the body and loss of the tooth. Over treatment must be avoided to prevent the eventual failure of the procedure.

After thirty years of successful reimplantations, here is what has worked for our Refugio County residents. Collect the tooth. The best place to "store" the tooth is in the socket it came out of. Don't attempt to clean the tooth other than gently pouring water over it. It is easy to mistake soft tissues important to the healing process for debris. Place the tooth into position, if possible. If you can place it back into the socket, YOU must hold the tooth in place at least fifteen minutes until a qualified professional takes over.

If the tooth cannot immediately be placed in the socket, we have made available to every Refugio County School district several "Save-a-Tooth" kits. We also have provided to all physicians in Refugio County a re-implantation kit that includes an ophthalmic steroid solution. If you are interested in obtaining a kit, please contact us.

If a kit is NOT IMMEDIATELY available, then immediately wrap the tooth in a wet cloth or paper napkin and place it in an empty, clean glass or cup, and cover with milk, if possible. Don't waste any time. The chances of a successful reimplantation improves with the shortest length of time from injury. If you can reach a dental office in ten minutes but it would take you an additional five minutes to place a tooth in milk or water, don't do anything that will take extra time! If you can't find the tooth, search until you do. Notify your dentist as soon as possible, or your physician. The tooth can be placed in a prescription ophthalmic steroid that will apparently increase the chances for successful reimplantation.

The same principals also apply to a mouth injury in which the teeth have been "Knocked Loose." Time is of utmost importance! Don't delay seeking immediate treatment. Don't wait until after the game, or when an office is "open", or, i.e. when a lay person decides "it's O.K.". If the tooth is loose, it will "tighten" within fifteen minutes as the blood clot forms around the tooth, leading to a false sense of security, and possibly a future root canal treatment. If a tooth is visibly loose, it must be evaluated professionally. The professional then assumes the responsibility.

Very often when a tooth is "Knocked Loose" or "Knocked Out", the blood supply in the tip end of the tooth is disrupted. Don't delay treatment. If treatment is sought early enough, dental professionals can often realign the tip and stabilize the tooth properly, and the blood supply can be reestablished, avoiding a root canal treatment or possible future loss of the tooth! Any "looseness" threatens the blood supply to a tooth. If the blood supply is permanently disrupted, then the tooth's nerve tissue will have to be treated by root canal therapy to save the tooth. The first fifteen minutes is a window of opportunity. Don't let it pass!

If you have experienced an accident and our office is unavailable, local physicians Dr. Peter Coldwell or Dr. Stephan Walker can be contacted and may be able to facilitate re-implantation or stabilization of a damaged tooth. Dana Adams can and will also facilitate treatment if she is contacted in a timely manner. If any professional is interested, we will facilitate their interest by sharing with them an extended explanation of this technique.

The most effective treatment is always prevention! A properly fitted athletic mouthpiece will prevent most injuries to the teeth, and lessen the possibility of concussions. Make sure your athlete has a properly fitted mouth guard if participating in any sport that can result in bodily contact. We have offered this service free of charge for two decades to our patients of record. If you are a parent, make sure the coach of your athlete understands his/her responsibilities regarding preventing and treating mouth injuries. Ask your dentist to fit your child with a professional mouth guard.

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