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CARING FOR YOUR MOUTH AFTER A DENTAL INJURY

This leaflet has been designed to help you look after your mouth in the weeks ahead. If you have any other questions that the leaflet does not answer or would like further explanation please ask a member of staff.

What dental injuries are covered in this leaflet?

Dental injuries include damage to the teeth, lips, gums and tongue. They can result from sport or road traffic accidents, as well as fights and falls. The most common injury is a broken or lost tooth.

INJURIES TO THE TEETH

Three sorts of injuries commonly occur.

- Broken or fractured teeth. The doctor has been able to assess the damage to your teeth by examining your mouth and, if necessary, by taking X-rays. If the broken tooth has left a sharp edge that might cut into your tongue, lips or cheek the edge may have been smoothed with a drill or a temporary filling inserted. You will now need to see your own dentist so that the tooth can receive long-term treatment (eg the missing part replaced by a permanent filling).
- Loose teeth. If the tooth is loose but still in the socket it may have been “splinted” into place. This allows the tooth to heal in the correct position.
- Avulsed teeth. An avulsed tooth is one that has come completely out of its socket. The treatment is usually to re-insert it as soon as possible into the socket and then use a splint to keep it in the right place and prevent further movement. How successful this will be depends on how long the tooth was out of the socket and how well it was looked after whilst it was out.

WHAT IS A DENTAL SPLINT?

The most common splint is made of clear plastic. The splint has to be made specially for you and so impressions of your teeth will have been taken. The splint often stays in place with suction but sometimes needs to be cemented to prevent it moving. Occasionally the best way to splint a tooth in position is to use a thin wire that attaches the damaged tooth to nearby healthy teeth. Splints are left in place for between one and two weeks.

HOW ARE SOFT TISSUE INJURIES TREATED IN THE MOUTH?

After you have been examined any foreign material such as glass or dirt will be removed from the wound. If necessary bleeding will be stopped before the wound is closed with stitches. These stitches do not need to be removed since they are dissolvable but they often take several weeks to disappear.

HOW DO I CARE FOR MY TEETH NOW?

- It is important to avoid biting too hard on a splint and therefore you will need to eat a soft diet to prevent the splint from breaking or any teeth moving.
- You should keep your teeth and mouth as clean as possible by regular, gentle tooth brushing. Mouthwashes are often helpful, eg warm salt water rinses - (dissolve a flat teaspoon of kitchen salt in a cup of warm water). Alternatively you can use mouthwashes bought over the counter (eg Corsodyl). Try to let as little food debris collect around the splint or injured teeth as possible.
- Avoid contact sports until you are advised to do so.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I GET HOME?

- The mouth is a sensitive area so injuries can be painful. You may need to take regular pain killing tablets for a few days (eg Ibuprofen).
- There may be some swelling and bruising around the site of injury. This may take up to a week to disappear. Take care when eating that you do not bite on any swollen areas.

- If you have been prescribed antibiotic tablets make sure that you complete the full course.

DO I NEED TO TAKE ANY TIME OFF WORK?

This varies enormously from person to person and also depends on what type of job you do. Most people require a couple of days off work. It is important to remember that you will not be able to drive or operate machinery for 48 hours if you have had a general anaesthetic.

ARE THERE ANY PROBLEMS TO LOOK OUT FOR?

- Bleeding – some oozing from around the site of trauma is to be expected. Significant bleeding is very unusual and should it occur it can usually be stopped by applying pressure over the area for at least 10 minutes with a rolled up handkerchief or swab.
- Infection – this is rare and does not usually occur for a week or so following trauma. Increasing discomfort or an unpleasant taste can be a sign of infection.

WILL I NEED FURTHER APPOINTMENTS?

Further appointments are not always necessary because a lot of treatment can be carried out by your own dentist. If a review appointment is important it will be arranged before you leave hospital.