



Protecting Your Smile

By Robert Jungman, DDS

Mammoth Lakes is home to a treasure trove of outdoor fun, sports, and physical activities. Many of the most exciting ones involve interaction with fast moving people and objects, and they are known to lead to accidental injuries, including those to the head and neck region. Safety gear has become increasingly more common in sports like skiing, snowboarding, and mountain biking, but what's important to protect? Often the biggest concerns are about the risks of concussions and fractured bones, but have you stopped to consider an injury to your smile? How could you prevent it or what would you do if it happened?

I don't want to be toothless!

Tooth fracture and dislodgement are two of the most common injuries to the mouth and can usually be prevented with a properly fitting mouthguard! Athletic mouthguards are a requirement in 4 NCAA sports, but are recommended by the American Dental Association for almost 30 different sports, including skating, skiing, hockey, biking, martial arts, and most sports involving a ball.

Mouthguards can be more comfortable and secure than many people think. If you have used a sports mouthguard in the past, the chances are good that it was purchased one at the store and modified it to



fit your teeth. These are often referred to as stock mouthguards or "boil-and-bite" guards. They are often poorly adapted to the teeth, are uncomfortable and don't stay in place. Unfortunately, they may also provide little benefit if an actual injury were to occur. Because they are modified at home, there is a large range in variability in how well these types of guards fit.

The best dental protection you can get from a mouthguard would be one custom-made by a dentist. With an accurate mold, the PVA guard material is pressure- or vacuum-fitted to the teeth and trimmed to the proper length. When made properly, these guards typically stay in place very well and provide some of the highest levels of comfort and security. Ask your dentist about having one made for your (or your child's) high-risk sports!

Oh no, the unthinkable happened!

In the event of a facial injury, there will usually be a lot of adrenaline, pain, emotion, and possibly bleeding. If there has been damage to the teeth, or if a tooth has been knocked out, time is essential to a good final result, so make sure that everything gets evaluated soon and treated if necessary.

When a tooth is avulsed (completely knocked out), the chance of successful replantation varies greatly with time. For best results, it should be replaced in the socket from which it came within 20 minutes, or at least within an hour. Note that this is faster than you might be able to make it to a dental office or emergency facility! The tooth should only be handled by the crown (wider, white part), and the root (longer part) should only be gently rinsed (not scrubbed) before replanting.

If you don't feel comfortable replacing it yourself, keep the tooth safe in a biologic liquid such as milk or saline (tap water isn't recommended, but could be used). The best liquid to use is Hank's Balanced Salt Solution, which is available in SAVE-A-TOOTH kits, which are commercially available and should be added to first aid kits when possible.

Other types of dental injuries (fracture, partial displacement, etc) also require prompt care. Whether it be snapping a tooth back into place or covering an exposed nerve, the sooner is still the better. Whether a dental injury is treated by yourself or a professional, follow-up care is equally important. How the tooth heals may determine if future procedures are necessary for the tooth to remain healthy.

Don't wait for an unfortunate incident to surprise you. It can happen to anyone, and the more prepared you are, the better the outcome will be!