

Dealing With The Least Expected on The Holidays

Winter is coming and so are all the outdoor activities that we all have enjoyed since we were little. Outdoor hockey, skiing, skating, tobogganing, snowboarding, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling are just some of the activities enjoyed in our area. These activities are sometimes fast paced, difficult to learn, and can be affected by weather (i.e. large amounts of snow or ice). This is when an accident may occur. A blow to the jaw or chin can cause a severe problem with the jaw joint (temporal mandibular joint). When an object comes in contact with the teeth at high speed it can result in fractured, avulsed (knocked out) teeth or trauma to the surrounding tissues of the lips, tongue, and gums.

Although the rules and regulations of local hockey leagues have changed as far as conduct and safe play, a mouthguard is still considered an essential piece of equipment. The mouthguard prevents injuries to the teeth and bones as well as preventing a concussion. So if you are not wearing one, fracturing teeth or having a tooth knocked out can easily happen. Our recommendation is to always wear a properly fitted mouthguard when participating in such sports. A custom-made mouthguard is best and can be obtained at your local dental office. These are snug fitting, mold to the teeth and allow you to talk. But unfortunately, this is not always possible and accidents do happen when least expected.

The key to dealing with a knocked out tooth is to act quickly, yet calmly, and follow these simple steps:

1. Pick the tooth up by the crown (the chewing part) not the root.
2. Gently rinse the tooth clean with cool water.
3. Reposition the tooth in the socket if possible. Do this by pushing the tooth in the socket or hold the tooth in place with fingers and gently bite down.
4. Keep the tooth moist at all times. If you cannot put it in the socket, place it in a glass of milk or water (with a pinch of salt) or on the inside of the cheek of the injured person.
5. See a dentist as soon as possible. Ideally, within 30 minutes to ensure the best chances of saving the tooth.

For fractured or mobile teeth make sure you see your dentist as soon as possible. There could be permanent damage to the nerve of the tooth and you could require additional treatment, and in severe cases the tooth may have to be removed. In the case of a severely mobile tooth, it may need to be splinted in place.

Injuries to the lips, tongue, and gums should be examined to make sure stitches are not required and any bleeding or swelling is controlled.

Even if you are wearing a properly fitted mouthguard, damage from a blow to the face or jaw can still occur. In this case you should be examined if you have persistent pain, clicking/ popping of the jaw joint, swelling, dizziness, difficulty opening/ closing, pain when chewing, headaches, neck aches, ringing/stuffiness in ears, or pain behind the eyes, because these are some of the symptoms of a concussion or temporal mandibular dysfunction (TMD), which is abnormal or impaired function of the jaw joint. This can be treated by a dentist who is trained in treatment of TMD.

After a thorough examination and analysis, treatment of an acute TMD may be treated with an oral appliance. The use of pulsed radiofrequency and a low level laser (cold laser) can be indicated as aids in healing the joint. For secondary TMD, other specialist such as a chiropractor, physiotherapist, massage therapist, or your family physician may be involved if the dysfunction is due to another source.

So as the weather gets colder this season and the snow begins to fall think of your safety and the safety of your children to make the best of all those outdoor activities.