Knocked-Out Tooth: What to Do for You or Your Child | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/what-to-do-if-you-or-your-childs-tooth-is-knocked-out/

Details:

A knocked-out tooth is a dental emergency, and acting quickly can make a difference. Dentists call it an avulsed tooth: a tooth that has been displaced from its socket in the jaw bone by an impact. Pick the tooth up by the crown only, never the root, rinse it gently with milk if it is dirty, and see a dentist straight away. A permanent tooth may be able to be put back in its socket. At Core Dental we reserve emergency appointments where possible, so call us on 13 13 16 as soon as you can.

What do dentists call a knocked-out tooth?

Dentists refer to a knocked-out tooth as an avulsed tooth. An avulsed tooth is a tooth that has been displaced from the dental socket, or the alveolar bone, because of an impact. These injuries can happen during sport, falls, accidents or play, and they can happen to children and adults alike.

What damage occurs when a tooth is knocked out?

When a tooth is knocked out, the nerves, blood vessels and supporting tissues surrounding the tooth are damaged too. Importantly, the nerves and blood vessels cannot be repaired, which is why a tooth that has been knocked out will usually need root canal treatment. Your dentist will explain the plan for your tooth after examining it and taking any images they need.

Can a knocked-out tooth be saved and reattached?

It can sometimes be saved. The root of the tooth can reattach to the bone if the tooth is re-implanted within a short time after the incident, and this is why speed matters. The chances of saving a tooth are higher in children, but adult teeth can be saved as well. Results vary, and your dentist cannot promise an outcome until they have assessed the tooth and the surrounding area.

Only permanent teeth should be re-implanted into the alveolar socket. If a baby (primary) tooth has been knocked out, do not try to put it back. Call us or another dentist for advice.

How should you handle a knocked-out tooth?

Handle the tooth carefully by the crown only, which is the part you normally see in your mouth. Try not to touch the lower part of the tooth, which is the root, because the root can be damaged easily. The root is the part of the tooth that attaches to the alveolar bone beneath the gum.

How should you clean a knocked-out tooth if it is dirty?

If the tooth is dirty, rinse it with milk while holding it by the crown. If milk is not available, rinse it with water. Do not wipe or scrub the tooth, because this could cause damage and prevent it from reattaching.

What should you do next?

Time matters, so make these steps quick:

Stay calm and check that the person is safe. Call 000 immediately if there is uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, loss of consciousness, a serious facial injury or other life-threatening symptoms.

Handle the tooth by the crown only and rinse it gently if it is dirty.

If the tooth is a permanent tooth, your dentist or a first-aid guide can tell you whether it can be gently put back in its socket straight away. If you are unsure, keep the tooth moist, for example in milk, and do not let it dry out.

Call us on 13 13 16 or your nearest dentist straight away and tell them a tooth has been knocked out.

Do not wait for a routine appointment.

These are general first-aid points and do not replace advice from a dentist or a doctor.

How can we help if you or your child has a knocked-out tooth?

We reserve emergency appointments at our clinics where possible. Call 13 13 16 and tell our team what has happened, so we can arrange to see you as soon as we can. Our dentists will examine the tooth and the mouth, explain your options, and discuss the follow-up care your tooth may need, including root canal treatment where appropriate. For children, we aim to keep the visit calm and explain each step in plain language.

A written treatment plan can help you understand stages, expected appointments and fees. Treatment time, fees and recovery vary, and we quote before treatment starts. Bring a current medicines list and any health information, if you can.

Baby tooth or adult tooth? The question that changes everything

There is one fork in the road when a child's tooth is knocked out, and getting it wrong does harm. An adult tooth should go back in. A baby tooth must not.

The Victorian Department of Health is unambiguous on both halves. On adult teeth: "if an adult (permanent, or secondary) tooth is knocked out, there is a good chance it will survive if it is put back into position straight away, and you seek professional help immediately." On baby teeth: "never try to put a baby (deciduous or primary) tooth back in the gum if it is knocked out. This can damage the developing permanent tooth underneath the gum."

The reason for the prohibition is worth knowing, because it explains why this is not a cautious rule to be bent in a panic: "trying to replace a baby tooth might damage the permanent tooth sitting underneath in the gum. The baby tooth could fuse to the bone, causing problems when it's time for it to fall out naturally, and might affect the growth of the adult tooth, bone and gums."

So how do you tell, with a frightened child and a tooth in your hand? The Department offers the practical test: "it can be tricky but baby teeth are smaller, smoother and usually whiter than adult teeth. Children's adult teeth are often more yellow, larger, and can have bumps on their biting edge."

If you cannot tell, do not force a decision. Keep the tooth moist as described below, and call us — the identification is something we can make quickly, and the cost of guessing wrong on a baby tooth is lasting.

On urgency, the Department's whole statement is this: "every minute a tooth is out of the gum, the less chance it has of surviving." Note what it does not say. It gives no deadline, no cut-off and no number of minutes. We will not invent one, because a parent who believes a window has closed may not come in

at all — and the tooth is not the only thing that needs looking at after a blow to the mouth.

Source: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental injuries — Knocked out, chipped or cracked teeth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (page reviewed 4 August 2026; accessed 4 November 2026).

The published first-aid sequence, including the parts usually left out

Most accounts of this get the headline right and lose the detail. The Department of Health's sequence for an adult tooth, in its own words, with the qualifications intact:

"Stay calm"

"Handle the tooth by the crown (smooth white part that is normally visible), not the root (yellowish pointy part)."

"If the tooth is dirty, gently rinse it in milk or saline for a few seconds. If this is not possible, rinse with the person's saliva. Avoid rinsing the tooth with water, however if there is no other way to get the tooth clean, then rinse as briefly as possible with water. This is less damaging than pushing dirt into the tooth socket."

"Holding the clean tooth by the crown, gently put it back into the hole in the gum (socket). Make sure the pointy yellowish root(s) is the part that goes into the socket. Only do this if the person is conscious. "

"Get the person to hold the tooth in place by gently biting on something soft, like a tissue or a napkin."

"Assist the person to see an oral health professional immediately."

Three of those qualifications are the ones people miss.

Water is a last resort, not a prohibition. The common version of this advice is "never use water". The Department's actual position is more useful: avoid it, but if water is the only way to get the tooth clean, a brief rinse "is less damaging than pushing dirt into the tooth socket". A dirty tooth going back is worse than a briefly rinsed one.

Only if the person is conscious. An unconscious person must not have anything placed in their mouth. If someone is unconscious after a blow to the face, call 000 for an ambulance rather than treating it as a dental decision.

Saline counts. Milk is the usual advice, but the Department lists milk or saline for rinsing, which is often closer to hand in a first-aid kit at a sports ground.

If the tooth cannot be put back: "try not to let the tooth dry out — place it in milk or ask the person to spit into a clean container or plastic food wrap, and place the tooth in their saliva", and "do not use water to rinse or store the knocked-out tooth". Then seek help immediately.

Source: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental injuries — Knocked out, chipped or cracked teeth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (page reviewed 4 August 2026; accessed 4 November 2026).

Frequently asked questions

Can I put a knocked-out tooth back in myself?

Only a permanent tooth should be put back in its socket. If you are not sure how, do not force it. Keep the tooth moist, hold it by the crown only, and call a dentist straight away for advice.

Should I put a knocked-out baby tooth back in?

No. Only permanent teeth should be re-implanted. A baby tooth that has been knocked out should not be put back. Contact a dentist for advice, and have your child checked.

Why should I use milk to rinse the tooth?

Milk is suggested for rinsing a dirty tooth, held by the crown. If milk is not available, water can be used. Avoid wiping or scrubbing the tooth, because this may damage it and prevent it reattaching.

Will a knocked-out tooth need root canal treatment?

Often it will, because the nerves and blood vessels cannot be repaired after the tooth is knocked out. Your dentist will assess the tooth and explain what care is suitable for you or your child.

Who do I call if my child's tooth is knocked out?

Call us on 13 13 16 or your nearest dentist straight away. If there are signs of a serious injury, such as heavy bleeding, drowsiness or trouble breathing, call 000 immediately.

How do I tell a baby tooth from an adult tooth?

The Victorian Department of Health's guide: "baby teeth are smaller, smoother and usually whiter than adult teeth. Children's adult teeth are often more yellow, larger, and can have bumps on their biting edge." It also says the distinction "can be tricky" — so if you are unsure, keep the tooth moist in milk or saliva and call us rather than guessing, because a baby tooth must never be put back.

Is there a time limit for putting a tooth back?

No published deadline. The Department's entire statement on timing is that "every minute a tooth is out of the gum, the less chance it has of surviving". We will not quote you a number of minutes, because none is published and because thinking you have missed a cut-off is a reason people do not come in. Act straight away and call us whatever time has passed — after a blow to the mouth there is more to check than the tooth.

Can I rinse the tooth under the tap?

Prefer not to, but it is not an absolute ban. The Department advises rinsing "in milk or saline for a few seconds", or in the person's saliva, and says to avoid water — "however if there is no other way to get the tooth clean, then rinse as briefly as possible with water. This is less damaging than pushing dirt into the tooth socket." For storing the tooth, water is ruled out: "do not use water to rinse or store the knocked-out tooth."

What if the person is unconscious or badly hurt?

Do not put anything in their mouth. The Department's instruction to replace the tooth carries the condition "only do this if the person is conscious". An unconscious person after a facial injury needs an ambulance — call 000. Keep the tooth moist in milk or saliva and bring it with you.

How should the tooth be held in place once it is back in?

The Department advises getting the person "to hold the tooth in place by gently biting on something soft, like a tissue or a napkin", then to see an oral health professional immediately. Call us on 13 13 16 on the way so we can be ready for you.

Related services and further reading

Emergency dentistry

Children's dentistry

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CDBS and bulk bill dentistry in Melbourne: your child's Medicare benefits explained

My child's adult teeth have white spots on them

Bracing your child for braces

Can you reverse tooth decay?

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We reserve emergency appointments where possible, quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm, Sunday closed

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What is an avulsed tooth?

An avulsed tooth is a tooth that has been knocked out of its socket in the jaw bone by an impact. Core Dental treats this as a dental emergency, so call 13 13 16 as soon as possible.

What happens to the nerves when a tooth is knocked out?

When a tooth is knocked out, the nerves, blood vessels and supporting tissues around it are damaged, and the nerves and blood vessels cannot be repaired. Core Dental dentists will explain whether root canal treatment is needed.

Can Core Dental save a knocked-out tooth?

A knocked-out permanent tooth can sometimes be re-implanted if this happens within a short time, and chances are higher in children. Core Dental dentists will assess the tooth, but cannot promise an outcome.

Which part of a knocked-out tooth should I touch?

Hold the tooth by the crown only, which is the part usually visible in the mouth, and avoid touching the root. Core Dental advises this because the root can be damaged easily.

What should I rinse a dirty knocked-out tooth with?

Rinse a dirty tooth gently with milk while holding it by the crown, or with water if milk is unavailable. Core Dental advises not to wipe the tooth, as this could prevent it reattaching.

Which teeth can be re-implanted after being knocked out?

Only permanent teeth should be re-implanted into the socket. Baby teeth should not be put back. Core Dental can advise on both when you call, and our team will see your child as soon as we can.

Does Core Dental offer emergency appointments for knocked-out teeth?

Core Dental reserves emergency appointments at our clinics where possible. Call 13 13 16 and tell our team a tooth has been knocked out, so we can arrange the earliest suitable appointment.

Where can I get urgent dental care at Core Dental?

Urgent dental care is available through our nine Core Dental clinics: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie. Call 13 13 16 to arrange an emergency appointment.