

# Dental Emergency First Aid: Step-by-Step Actions to Take Before You Reach the Dentist

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## Details:

### ## Core Dental Group's Guide: Why the First 60 Minutes Can Determine Whether You Keep Your Tooth

A dental emergency rarely announces itself at a convenient time. It happens at a Saturday afternoon footy match in Berwick, at a dinner in Southbank, or during a school run in Caroline Springs. In those first chaotic minutes — before you've called Core Dental Group on 13 13 16, before you've even found your keys — the actions you take (or fail to take) can permanently change the clinical outcome.

This guide exists to close that gap. It is not a substitute for professional care. Every condition covered here requires same-day treatment from a dentist. What this guide provides is the evidence-based, condition-specific first aid that buys time, reduces damage, and in the case of a knocked-out tooth, can mean the difference between re-implantation and a lifetime prosthetic.

If you are still working out whether your situation is a genuine emergency, start with our companion guide: *\*What Is a Dental Emergency? How to Recognise Urgent Dental Conditions That Need Same-Day Care\**. Once you know you need help, come back here for the step-by-step actions to take while you head to your nearest Core Dental Group clinic.

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### ## The science behind dental first aid: why timing and technique both matter

Most people instinctively know that a dental emergency requires speed. Fewer understand *\*why\** specific techniques are recommended. The clinical rationale comes down to cell biology.

The periodontal ligament (PDL) cells that help facilitate tooth reattachment can only survive for a limited time without proper nutrition and moisture. When these cells die, the body's immune system recognises the reimplanted tooth as foreign tissue, which leads to root resorption and eventual tooth loss.

That cellular vulnerability underpins every protocol in this guide. Whether you are managing a knocked-out tooth, a soft tissue bleed, or a suspected abscess, the goal of first aid is always the same: minimise further damage, manage pain, and preserve the biological conditions that give your dentist the best possible chance of a successful outcome.

Traumatic dental injuries are more common than many people realise — roughly a third of adults experience dental trauma at some point in their lives. Knowing what to do before you reach the clinic is not an edge-case skill. It is something every adult in Melbourne should have ready.

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### ## Emergency first aid by condition

#### ### 1. Knocked-out (avulsed) permanent tooth — the highest-stakes scenario

**\*\*Time sensitivity: Extreme. Act within minutes.\*\***

Avulsion of permanent teeth is one of the most serious dental injuries a person can experience. Prompt and correct emergency management is essential for achieving the best possible outcome. The 2020 guidelines from the International Association of Dental Traumatology (IADT) — published in *Dental Traumatology*\* ([Fouad et al., 2020; DOI: 10.1111/edt.12573](https://doi.org/10.1111/edt.12573)) — represent the current gold standard for managing avulsion injuries.

**\*\*Step-by-step protocol:\*\***

1. **\*\*Pick up the tooth by the crown only.\*\*** Pick it up by the crown, avoid touching the root, and rinse it gently for no more than 10 seconds if it is dirty. The root surface carries the PDL cells you are trying to protect, and handling that area can cause irreversible damage.
  2. **\*\*Attempt immediate re-implantation.\*\*** The best chance of long-term survival comes from reimplanting the tooth within 5 minutes. If the socket is clean and the patient is calm, gently seat the tooth back into position and bite down softly on gauze to hold it in place.
  3. **\*\*If re-implantation is not possible, store it correctly.\*\*** Transport the avulsed tooth in a glass of cold milk or hold it in the patient's mouth against the cheek.
  4. **\*\*Understand why milk works.\*\*** When root surface cells come into contact with water, they tend to swell and can burst. Milk provides the proteins needed to maintain proper pH balance, along with antibacterial properties and sugars that keep root cells viable. Research by Lekic et al., reviewed in *The Journal of Pedodontics*\* ([PMC5571385](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5571385/)), confirmed that milk was as effective as Hank's Balanced Salt Solution (HBSS) for storing avulsed teeth for up to one hour, and superior to saline, saliva, or water.
  5. **\*\*Avoid tap water.\*\*** Water may seem harmless, but it is not an appropriate storage medium for an avulsed tooth. It affects root cells in ways that reduce the chances of successful re-implantation — milk is far less damaging and its balance of salts and fluid is more suitable.
  6. **\*\*Call Core Dental Group immediately and travel directly to the nearest clinic.\*\*** PDL cells on the root surface begin to die within 15 to 60 minutes of being outside the mouth, particularly if the tooth dries out. After roughly an hour in dry conditions, the odds of saving the tooth drop sharply.
- \*\*Clinical outcome data:\*\*** A retrospective analysis published in *PMC*\* (2023) tracking 62 replanted permanent teeth found that of the 25 teeth replanted within one hour, 64% remained in their sockets. Notably, 71% of all lost teeth had an extra-alveolar time of more than one hour. The clock is not metaphorical — it is measurable in survival rates.
- > **\*\*Important note for parents:\*\*** Never attempt to re-implant a knocked-out baby (primary) tooth. The developing adult tooth beneath can be damaged in the process. See our dedicated guide: *Emergency Children's Dentistry Melbourne: How to Handle Urgent Dental Injuries in Kids*\*

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## ### 2. Severe toothache — controlling pain before your appointment

**\*\*Time sensitivity: High, especially with swelling or fever.\*\***

A severe toothache is rarely just pain — it is a signal that something structural or infectious is happening inside the tooth or surrounding tissue. First aid here is about managing symptoms without masking the warning signs that should shape your care pathway.

**\*\*Step-by-step protocol:\*\***

1. **\*\*Rinse with warm salt water.\*\*** This reduces oral bacteria and can temporarily relieve inflammation around the affected tooth.

2. **Use dental floss gently.** Food impaction between teeth can mimic or amplify toothache pain, and removal sometimes provides immediate relief.
3. **Apply a cold compress correctly.** If there is swelling, place an ice pack or cold compress on the outside of the cheek (20 minutes on, 20 minutes off). Do not use heat. Heat draws blood flow to the area and can accelerate swelling.
4. **Take ibuprofen over paracetamol where possible.** Ibuprofen handles dental pain better than paracetamol because it also reduces inflammation. Take 200–400 mg every 4–6 hours as needed and follow the daily limit stated on the label.
5. **Never place aspirin directly on the gum or tooth.** Aspirin placed against gum tissue causes chemical burns and complicates professional treatment. This is a persistent myth worth putting to rest.
6. **Elevate your head when resting.** Keeping your head elevated reduces pressure and throbbing around the affected area.

For a detailed breakdown of toothache causes and triage levels, see: [\\*Severe Toothache Relief: Causes, Emergency Treatments, and When to Act Immediately\\*](#).

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### ### 3. Knocked-out, chipped, or broken tooth — trauma first aid

**Time sensitivity:** High for complete fractures; moderate for chips.

Severity depends on how deep the crack or fracture runs. A surface chip is largely cosmetic. A crack that reaches the nerve is urgent. Your first priority is to manage the immediate environment and preserve any tooth fragments.

**Step-by-step protocol:**

1. **Rinse your mouth with warm water** to clear blood and debris from the area.
2. **Control bleeding with gauze.** Apply a piece of gauze to the area for about 10 minutes or until the bleeding stops.
3. **Apply a cold compress to the outside of the cheek.** Hold it against your cheek (15 minutes on, 15 off) to reduce swelling and dull pain.
4. **Collect and store any tooth fragments.** Store broken pieces in milk or saline. Your dentist may be able to bond them back depending on the nature of the fracture.
5. **Cover sharp edges.** Dental wax or sugar-free gum can cover any sharp edges that could cut your cheeks or tongue until you are seen.
6. **Do not chew on the affected side** and avoid temperature extremes until you have been assessed by a dentist.

For a complete clinical breakdown of fracture types and same-day treatment options, see: [\\*Knocked-Out, Chipped & Broken Teeth: Emergency Treatment Options and Tooth-Saving Timelines\\*](#).

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### ### 4. Dental abscess — first aid and the red lines that mean go to hospital

**Time sensitivity:** Extreme if systemic symptoms are present.

A dental abscess requires same-day professional treatment. There is no safe home remedy that resolves the underlying infection. First aid is limited to symptom management while you arrange urgent care. More importantly, you need to know the warning signs that mean bypassing the dental clinic

entirely and calling 000.

**\*\*Symptom management while awaiting care:\*\***

- Rinse with warm salt water to reduce bacterial load in the mouth. - Take ibuprofen as directed for pain and inflammation. - Apply a cold compress externally to manage facial swelling. - Keep your head elevated when lying down to reduce pressure and throbbing. - Do not attempt to lance or pop the abscess yourself.

**\*\*The red lines — when to call 000 or go directly to a hospital emergency department:\*\***

If you are experiencing signs of sepsis — rapid heart rate, confusion, difficulty breathing, or low blood pressure — go to the emergency room immediately. Emergency medical facilities are equipped to manage sepsis, which requires IV antibiotics, continuous monitoring, and potentially intensive care.

Seek immediate emergency medical care if you notice any of the following:

- Swelling in the floor of your mouth, under your tongue, or in your throat. This can compromise your airway. The condition is known as Ludwig's angina — a severe infection that causes rapid swelling of tissues in the neck and under the jaw. - Swelling that extends to the neck or floor of the mouth. - High fever, chills, rapid heart rate, extreme fatigue, or confusion. - Difficulty swallowing or opening your mouth.

A dental abscess does not resolve without treatment. It may drain spontaneously, which can temporarily reduce discomfort, but the bacterial source remains active. Without treatment, the infection will continue to spread — increasing the risk of reaching deeper tissue spaces, the bloodstream, and in severe cases, the airway.

For a full clinical explanation of abscess types and same-day treatment pathways, see: [\\*Dental Abscess & Oral Infection Emergencies: Risks, Symptoms, and Urgent Care in Melbourne\\*](#).

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**### 5. Lost crown, filling, or veneer — protecting exposed tooth structure**

**\*\*Time sensitivity: Moderate. Seek same-day care where possible.\*\***

A lost crown or filling is less immediately dangerous than trauma or abscess, but the exposed tooth structure is vulnerable to fracture, temperature sensitivity, and bacterial ingress. Left untreated, the tooth can shift or crack further, turning a manageable problem into a more complex one.

**\*\*Step-by-step protocol:\*\***

1. **\*\*Retrieve and rinse the crown or filling\*\*** if you have it. Most crowns can be recemented if they remain intact.
2. **\*\*Use temporary dental cement.\*\*** Temporary dental cement or wax is available at most Australian pharmacies. Clean the tooth first with salt water, then gently place the material over the exposed spot to protect it from food and temperature sensitivity.
3. **\*\*Never use superglue.\*\*** It can damage the tooth surface and make professional re-cementation impossible.
4. **\*\*Avoid chewing on that side\*\*** and steer clear of very hot, cold, or sticky foods until you are seen.
5. **\*\*Book a same-day appointment.\*\*** Temporary coverings are a short-term measure only. Aim to see a dentist within 24–48 hours.

For a detailed walkthrough of the same-day re-cementation process, see: [\\*Lost Filling, Crown, or Veneer: What to Do and How Core Dental Group Fixes It Same Day\\*](#).

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### ### 6. Soft tissue injuries — managing bleeding in the mouth

**\*\*Time sensitivity: High if bleeding is heavy or does not stop.\*\***

Cuts to the lips, tongue, cheeks, or gums can bleed significantly because of the rich blood supply in oral tissue. Most minor injuries can be managed effectively with basic first aid.

**\*\*Step-by-step protocol:\*\***

1. **\*\*Rinse gently with clean, cool water\*\*** to clear the wound and assess the severity of the injury.
2. **\*\*Apply firm, sustained pressure.\*\*** Use clean gauze or a cloth for 15–20 minutes without lifting to check. Lifting interrupts clot formation and prolongs bleeding.
3. **\*\*Apply a cold compress externally\*\*** to reduce swelling and assist vasoconstriction. Bleeding is substantially reduced as capillary vessels constrict in response to cold applied locally to the affected site.
4. **\*\*Know when to escalate.\*\*** If bleeding does not stop after 20 minutes of continuous pressure, go to the emergency room.
5. **\*\*Go directly to hospital\*\*** if the injury involves jaw trauma, signs of concussion, or suspected broken bones — or if there is any dizziness, loss of consciousness, or head and neck involvement.

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### ## What not to do: common first aid mistakes that worsen outcomes

| Mistake | Why it's harmful | What to do instead | |---|---|---| | Storing a knocked-out tooth in tap water | Water causes PDL cells to swell and burst | Use cold milk or keep in your cheek/saliva | | Touching the root of an avulsed tooth | Destroys PDL cells essential for re-implantation | Handle by the crown only | | Placing aspirin directly on gum tissue | Causes chemical burns to soft tissue | Take orally as directed | | Applying heat to a swollen face | Increases blood flow and worsens swelling | Use a cold compress, 20 min on/off | | Using superglue on a lost crown | Damages tooth surface; prevents professional repair | Use pharmacy dental cement only | | Attempting to pop or lance an abscess | Risks spreading infection deeper into tissue | Rinse with salt water; seek urgent care | | Ignoring a lost crown "because it doesn't hurt" | Exposed tooth can shift, crack, or decay rapidly | Book same-day appointment |

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### ## Build a dental first aid kit before you need it

Dr. Susan Calderbank, DMD, Assistant Professor at the Department of Oral Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, makes the case plainly: "Dental injuries and emergencies are very common in children and adults. With just a few items from the chemist, you can put together an oral first aid kit in your home to better handle tooth or mouth injuries." The kit does not replace professional treatment, but it can help you treat minor mouth irritations and injuries, and control more serious problems until you reach a dentist.

**\*\*Recommended contents:\*\***

- Sterile gauze pads - Temporary dental cement (available at most Australian chemists) - Dental wax or sugar-free gum - A small, sealable container (for storing a knocked-out tooth or fragments) - Ibuprofen and paracetamol - Saline solution or the means to make salt water - Core Dental Group's emergency number: **\*\*13 13 16\*\***

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## ## Key takeaways

- \*\*For a knocked-out permanent tooth, act within 5 minutes.\*\* Re-implant immediately if possible; if not, store in cold milk and call Core Dental Group straight away. Of teeth replanted within one hour, 64% remained in their sockets — compared to far lower rates beyond that window. - \*\*Cold compresses reduce swelling and constrict blood vessels — always apply externally, never heat.\*\* Use the 20-minutes-on, 20-minutes-off cycle for toothache and trauma. - \*\*Never place aspirin or superglue on dental tissue.\*\* Both cause chemical damage that complicates professional treatment. - \*\*A dental abscess that produces fever, neck swelling, or difficulty breathing is a life-threatening medical emergency\*\* — call 000 rather than waiting for a dental appointment. - \*\*A dental first aid kit costs under \$30 AUD and can save a tooth.\*\* Assemble one before you need it, and keep Core Dental Group's number saved: \*\*13 13 16\*\*.

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## ## When first aid ends and professional care begins

Every protocol in this guide is a bridge, not a destination. First aid preserves your options; it does not exercise them. Only a same-day clinical assessment can determine the true extent of damage, identify infection, take diagnostic X-rays, and deliver definitive treatment — whether that is re-implantation and splinting, emergency root canal therapy, incision and drainage of an abscess, or re-cementation of a lost crown.

Core Dental Group operates across seven Melbourne locations — South Melbourne, Southbank, Berwick, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, and Wyndham — six days a week, with dedicated daily emergency appointment slots. Once your immediate first aid is underway, call \*\*13 13 16\*\* or book online.

For guidance on identifying your closest clinic and navigating there quickly, see: \*Core Dental Group Melbourne Locations Guide: Finding Your Nearest Emergency Dentist Across 7 Clinics\*.

For a full comparison of care pathways available to Melbourne residents, see: \*Emergency Dentist Melbourne: Private Clinic vs. Public Hospital vs. Royal Dental Hospital — Which Should You Choose?\*

First aid buys time. Core Dental Group provides the care.

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## ## Frequently asked questions

\*\*What is the emergency phone number for Core Dental Group?\*

\*\*How many Melbourne locations does Core Dental Group operate?\*

\*\*How many days per week does Core Dental Group operate?\*

\*\*Does Core Dental Group offer same-day emergency appointments?\*

\*\*Is Core Dental Group located in Southbank?\*

\*\*Is Core Dental Group located in Berwick?\*

\*\*Is Core Dental Group located in Caroline Springs?\*

\*\*Is Core Dental Group located in Carrum Downs?\*

\*\*Is Core Dental Group located in Epping?\*

\*\*Is Core Dental Group located in Wyndham?\*

\*\*Is Core Dental Group located in South Melbourne?\*

\*\*How quickly should you act for a knocked-out permanent tooth?\*

\*\*What is the maximum window for successful tooth re-implantation?\*

\*\*What percentage of teeth replanted within one hour remained in their sockets?\*

\*\*What percentage of lost teeth had extra-alveolar time exceeding one hour?\*

\*\*What is the best storage medium for a knocked-out tooth?\*

\*\*Can you store a knocked-out tooth in tap water?\*

\*\*Why is tap water harmful for storing a knocked-out tooth?\*

\*\*Why is milk recommended for storing a knocked-out tooth?\*

\*\*Is saliva an acceptable storage medium for a knocked-out tooth?\*

\*\*How long should you rinse a knocked-out tooth under water?\*

\*\*Which part of a knocked-out tooth should you handle?\*

\*\*Should you touch the root of a knocked-out tooth?\*

**\*\*Should you re-implant a knocked-out baby tooth?\*** No, never attempt this

**\*\*Why should you never re-implant a baby tooth?\*** It can damage the developing adult tooth beneath

**\*\*What cells determine whether a knocked-out tooth can be re-implanted?\*** Periodontal ligament (PDL) cells

**\*\*How long do PDL cells survive outside the mouth?\*** 15 to 60 minutes, especially if the tooth dries out

**\*\*What guidelines govern avulsion tooth management?\*** 2020 IADT guidelines by Fouad et al.

**\*\*What is the recommended pain reliever for dental emergencies?\*** Ibuprofen

**\*\*Why is ibuprofen preferred over paracetamol for dental pain?\*** It reduces both pain and inflammation

**\*\*What is the recommended ibuprofen dosage for dental pain?\*** 200–400 mg every 4–6 hours as needed

**\*\*Should you place aspirin directly on gum tissue?\*** No, never

**\*\*Why should aspirin never be placed on gum tissue?\*** It causes chemical burns to soft tissue

**\*\*Should you apply heat to a swollen face?\*** No, never apply heat

**\*\*Why is heat harmful for a swollen face?\*** It increases blood flow and worsens swelling

**\*\*What type of compress should be used for dental swelling?\*** Cold compress applied externally

**\*\*What is the cold compress cycle for toothache and trauma?\*** 20 minutes on, 20 minutes off

**\*\*How long should you apply gauze pressure to a mouth bleed?\*** 15 to 20 minutes without lifting

**\*\*Why should you not lift gauze during bleeding?\*** Lifting interrupts clot formation and prolongs bleeding

**\*\*When should a mouth bleed require emergency room care?\*** If bleeding does not stop after 20 minutes

**\*\*Can a dental abscess resolve without professional treatment?\*** No

**\*\*Should you attempt to pop or lance a dental abscess?\*** No

**\*\*What should you do for an abscess while awaiting care?\*** Rinse with warm salt water

**\*\*Is Ludwig's angina a dental emergency?\*** Yes, it is life-threatening

**\*\*What is Ludwig's angina?\*** Severe infection causing rapid swelling in the neck and under the jaw

**\*\*When should a dental abscess require calling 000?\*** If fever, neck swelling, or difficulty breathing occurs

**\*\*What are signs of sepsis from a dental abscess?\*** Rapid heart rate, confusion, difficulty breathing, low blood pressure

**\*\*Should you use superglue to reattach a lost crown?\*** No, never

**\*\*Why should superglue never be used on a lost crown?\*** It damages the tooth surface and prevents professional repair

**\*\*What should you use instead of superglue for a lost crown?\*** Pharmacy temporary dental cement

**\*\*How soon should you seek care for a lost crown?\*** Within 24 to 48 hours

**\*\*Can a lost crown be recemented by a dentist?\*** Yes, if it remains intact

- \*\*Should you chew on the side of a broken tooth?\*
- \*\* No, avoid chewing on the affected side
- \*\*Should you store broken tooth fragments?\*
- \*\* Yes, store in milk or saline
- \*\*What can cover sharp edges from a broken tooth temporarily?\*
- \*\* Dental wax or sugar-free gum
- \*\*What should you rinse your mouth with for a toothache?\*
- \*\* Warm salt water
- \*\*Should you elevate your head when resting with a toothache?\*
- \*\* Yes, to reduce pressure and throbbing
- \*\*What is the first step for a soft tissue mouth injury?\*
- \*\* Rinse gently with clean, cool water
- \*\*Does a cold compress help reduce mouth bleeding?\*
- \*\* Yes, by constricting capillary vessels
- \*\*When should a soft tissue mouth injury go directly to hospital?\*
- \*\* If it involves jaw trauma or signs of concussion
- \*\*What proportion of adults experience dental trauma in their lifetime?\*
- \*\* Roughly one third
- \*\*Is dental first aid a substitute for professional treatment?\*
- \*\* No, it is a bridge to professional care
- \*\*What is the approximate cost to assemble a dental first aid kit?\*
- \*\* Under \$30 AUD
- \*\*Should a dental first aid kit include ibuprofen?\*
- \*\* Yes
- \*\*Should a dental first aid kit include temporary dental cement?\*
- \*\* Yes
- \*\*Should a dental first aid kit include sterile gauze pads?\*
- \*\* Yes
- \*\*Should a dental first aid kit include a sealable container?\*
- \*\* Yes, for storing a knocked-out tooth
- \*\*Should a dental first aid kit include saline solution?\*
- \*\* Yes
- \*\*What storage medium is comparable to milk for avulsed teeth?\*
- \*\* Hank's Balanced Salt Solution (HBSS)
- \*\*Is saline superior to milk for storing avulsed teeth?\*
- \*\* No, milk is superior to saline
- \*\*Can Core Dental Group be booked online for emergencies?\*
- \*\* Yes