For badly damaged teeth, dental implants offer safe, permanent fix

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Facial and dental trauma, particularly teeth being knocked out, can occur during many different accidents, including motorized and nonmotorized accidents, stunts and falls.

Experts caution people to practice safety first, but when accidents do happen, the first step is to be seen in the emergency room for first-aid care and then referred to the appropriate restorative source.

If the tooth is irreparably damaged, a referral to an oral or maxiofacial surgeon may be appropriate. Standard of care comes down to three choices:

- Creation of a removable plastic tooth insert, called a **flipper**.
- A crown and **bridge** between two teeth.
- A permanent **dental implant**, which is the preferred treatment option.

**Dental implants last for life**

Ninety-eight percent of the time, dental implants heal well and last for life so the patient doesn't have to worry about replacing it or taking it out at night like he would with less permanent fixes.
The implant procedure involves surgically affixing a titanium post in to the upper or lower jaw. Once the bone has healed securely around the post, an artificial tooth that looks and functions like the original is attached to the post.

In many cases, the dental implant is the best long-term solution to the problem because it is relatively quick and more aesthetically pleasing.

The dental implant placement procedure takes under an hour from start to finish and the discomfort level is less than having a tooth pulled. Most people go back to work the next day and only experience mild discomfort for about a week.

Dental implants result in a natural-looking replacement tooth, which is particularly important for patients who may have suffered dental injuries to highly visible places, such as the front teeth.

In more severe cases where the jawbone has also been damaged, surgeons can graft bone from another part of the body, typically the mouth, shin or hip, to rebuild the area before attaching an implant. Most small grafts can be done under local or general anesthesia in an outpatient setting. If bone grafts are necessary, patients typically need to heal for three to six months before the implant can be inserted to ensure the best outcomes.

Seek regular dental health care

Oral and maxiofacial surgeons encourage people to seek regular dental health care from a general dentist. Poor dental hygiene, which can result in fragile teeth more prone to chip or break off entirely, and gum disease are other common causes of dental problems that lead to the need for a dental implant.

Another warning sign that something may be wrong is dentures that do not fit properly, which could indicate thinning bone.

Dentistry is not about an amazing smile -- it’s about maintaining general oral health, which is important for overall health.

Dental implants can be done for individual or multiple teeth, depending on the location of tooth problems. The oral surgeon and restorative dentist work in concert to determine the best treatment options for the needs of each individual patient.

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This week’s NetWellness column is authored by Deepak Krishnan, DDS, assistant professor at the Division of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery at the University of Cincinnati.

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