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Dental Trauma & Tooth Loss

Patient Information Fact Sheet Based on a clinical case by AProf Adrian DeAngelis

Important Information for Patients

This fact sheet provides general information only. It is not intended to replace individual medical or dental advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Every patient's circumstances are different, and treatment recommendations will depend on a comprehensive clinical assessment.

Understanding Dental Trauma

Dental trauma can occur unexpectedly as a result of accidents, falls, sporting injuries, or collisions. Injuries may involve:

- Teeth being knocked out or lost
- Teeth being moved out of position or fractured
- Damage to the jawbone that supports the teeth
- Injuries to surrounding soft tissues of the face and mouth

The severity of dental trauma can vary widely, and not all injuries require the same type or extent of treatment.

Example of a traumatic dental injury

In one clinical scenario, a **24 year old woman was struck by a cyclist while walking**, resulting in a facial injury. The impact caused the loss of several front teeth, movement and fracture of other teeth, and damage to the jawbone. She initially received emergency treatment before being referred for further assessment and longer term care.

This example is provided for educational purposes only. Individual outcomes and treatment pathways vary.

Why Replacing Missing Teeth May Be Considered

Loss of one or more teeth can affect people in different ways. Some patients may notice changes to:

- Chewing or biting
- Speech
- Appearance
- Confidence when smiling or socialising

For individuals who lose teeth suddenly due to trauma or surgery, the change can be particularly confronting.

Decisions about whether, when, and how to replace missing teeth depend on personal preferences, clinical findings, oral health, medical history, and overall treatment goals.

Tooth Replacement Options

Historically, missing teeth were commonly replaced with:

- **Removable dentures**
- **Fixed bridges**, which rely on adjacent teeth for support

These options are still appropriate in some situations and may be recommended depending on a patient's circumstances.

Dental implants

Dental implants are one possible option for replacing missing teeth. They involve placing a titanium fixture into the jawbone to support a tooth or dental prosthesis.

Potential considerations with dental implants may include:

- Not relying on neighbouring teeth for support
- Providing a fixed (non removable) replacement option
- Supporting function and appearance in an appropriate clinical setting

Dental implants are not suitable for all patients. A detailed assessment is required to determine whether implants are an appropriate option.

Bone Availability and Additional Procedures

Successful placement of dental implants depends on having sufficient quality and quantity of jawbone. Following trauma, infection, or long standing tooth loss, this may not always be the case.

In some situations, additional procedures may be discussed, such as:

- **Onlay bone grafting**
- **Block bone grafting**
- **Sinus lift procedures** (in the upper jaw)

In certain severe cases, bone may need to be taken from another part of the body to rebuild the jaw prior to implant placement.

Not all patients require bone grafting, and not all forms of grafting are appropriate for every individual. Each option carries its own risks, benefits, and recovery considerations.

Zygomatic (Cheekbone) Implants

In complex situations where conventional implants or bone grafting are not suitable, alternative implant techniques may be considered. One such option is zygomatic implants, which anchor into the cheekbone rather than the upper jaw.

These implants may be considered in cases involving:

- Extensive upper jawbone loss
- Previous major surgery to the head and neck region
- Situations where other reconstructive options are not appropriate

Zygomatic implants are a highly specialised treatment and are not indicated for most patients. Referral to experienced clinicians is required for assessment.

A Multidisciplinary Approach

Severe dental trauma may require care from multiple dental and medical professionals. This can include oral and maxillofacial surgeons, prosthodontists, orthodontists, and other specialists.

A team based approach allows:

- Careful treatment planning
- Coordination of different stages of care
- Consideration of both functional and aesthetic outcomes

The combination of specialists involved will vary depending on individual needs and treatment goals.

Outcomes and Expectations

The aim of treatment following dental trauma is to restore oral function and appearance as much as possible. Outcomes depend on many factors, including:

- Extent of injury
- Healing response
- Chosen treatment approach
- Ongoing oral care and follow up

While improvements in function and appearance are often achievable, no medical or dental procedure can guarantee a specific result.

Key Points to Remember

- Dental trauma can have both physical and emotional impacts
- Multiple treatment options may be available
- Not all treatments are suitable for every patient
- Individual assessment and informed decision making are essential

If you have suffered dental trauma, consultation with appropriately qualified dental professionals is important to understand your options.

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