Sound Bites

If you knock out a tooth, can it be saved? Yes, but you have to act fast.

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One of the most common mouth injuries is having a tooth knocked out. But if an accidental fall, a fight, a sports injury or a bite into a piece of too-hard food causes a pearly white to drop from your mouth, here's how to react.

First, carefully pick up that precious tooth by its hard enamel surface, being sure not to touch the root. If possible, put the tooth back into place. (Careful, don't swallow it!) If that's not possible, immerse the tooth, ideally, in saline solution. But if you don't have saline on hand, drop the tooth into saliva or cool whole milk. "The idea is that you don't want to put the tooth in water because that can damage cells," explains dentist Joseph Banker, DMD, a member of the Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry. "You want to preserve the root of the tooth."

Next, hightail it to a dentist pronto to have the tooth reimplanted, "a fairly simple process," Banker says.

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