

A temporary fix for my broken tooth? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I had a big part of my tooth fall out when I was chewing on gum and I can't get in to see my dentist for approximately five days. Is there anything I can do in the mean time to make myself feel more comfortable?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It is certainly useful to have information while you're waiting for appointment day. To help you bear any pain you're experiencing, you may want to take an over-the-counter pain reliever. Products with ibuprofen should be effective at reducing pain, as well as swelling, and tend to be a bit more effective than acetaminophen. Ultimately, your dentist may recommend a combination of pain relievers, including aspirin, acetaminophen, and caffeine.

What to do about that hunk of missing tooth? Many pharmacies sell "make-it-yourself" temporary filling kits. These kits include either a single putty or two soft putties that should be mixed together. If you can put the mixture into your broken tooth without discomfort, you should be fine until your dental appointment. To reduce possible pain while eating, you may want to stick with soft foods and liquids, and avoid anything too hot or cold. You could also try chewing solely on the intact side of your mouth. If you find it impossible to eat, or are generally extremely uncomfortable, your dentist may suggest you squeeze yourself in for an emergency appointment. Or, s/he might recommend a colleague who is available to see you sooner.

Normally, chewing gum does not cause teeth to break. Some gums do tend to stick to artificial dental work, such as dentures or a bridge. If this is an issue, try a gum especially designed not to stick. Or even better, you could calm your chompers and avoid gum completely until the broken tooth is mended.

Keep in mind that teeth usually break for a reason. You might have some decay under a filling or around the broken tooth. Sometimes, if a tooth is severely damaged, and has a large filling, the tooth will fracture because so little of the tooth is actually left. Regular dental check-ups (at least once a year), partnered with thorough tooth brushing and flossing, can help keep your pearly whites healthy (and intact!).

Alice!

Category:

[General Health](#) [2]

[Oral Health](#) [3]

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Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
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Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/temporary-fix-my-broken-tooth>
- [2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/general-health>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/oral-health>
- [4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/dental-care-nyc>
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/wisdom-teeth-removed-what-do-i-do-now>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/cold-hard-truth-chewing-ice-and-teeth>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/do-whitening-toothpastes-work>