

# How to treat a loose tooth in adults

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Causes Prevention Treatments Outlook

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A loose tooth in a child often signals an exciting rite of passage. Once a person reaches adolescence, however, a loose tooth is no longer a normal occurrence.

Adults may be alarmed when they notice loose teeth. Adult teeth are permanent and designed to last a lifetime.

Some causes of loose teeth in adults are harmless. Others require the care of a dental professional to save the tooth, remove it, or replace it with an implant or bridge.

## Causes of a loose tooth in an adult

The following factors are often responsible for looseness in one or more teeth:

### Gum disease

Also known as periodontitis, this disease involves inflammation and infection of the gums. It is usually caused by poor dental hygiene habits.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in the United States report that half of the country's adults aged 30 or older have gum disease.



Poor dental hygiene may cause a loose tooth.

When brushing and flossing do not remove plaque, gum disease can develop. Plaque contains bacteria. It sticks to teeth and hardens over time until only a dental health professional can remove it.

Hardened plaque, known as tartar, causes the gums to pull away from the teeth, creating gaps that can become infected.

Over time, this process can break down the bone and tissue supporting the teeth, causing the teeth to become loose.

Other signs of gum disease include:

- gums that are tender, red, painful, or swollen
- gums that bleed when the teeth are brushed
- gum recession
- changes in the way the teeth fit together

Any signs of gum disease should be checked by a dentist as soon as possible. Early detection and treatment can prevent tooth loss.

## Pregnancy

Raised levels of estrogen and progesterone during pregnancy can affect the bones and tissues in the mouth.

Having more of these hormones can alter the periodontium, which is the collection of bones and ligaments that support the teeth and keep them in place. When the periodontium is affected, one or more teeth may feel loose.

The changes to this part of the body will resolve after pregnancy, and they are not a cause for concern. However, anyone experiencing pain or loose teeth during pregnancy should see a dentist to rule out gum disease and other oral health problems.

It is safe for pregnant people to have dental checkups, cleanings, and X-rays, according to the American Dental Association and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

In fact, because of a possible link between gum disease and premature birth, pregnant people are encouraged to see dentists regularly.

## Injury to the teeth

Healthy teeth are strong, but an impact from a blow to the face or a car accident, for example, can damage teeth and surrounding tissue. The result may be chipped or loose teeth.

Similarly, clenching the teeth during times of stress or grinding them at night can wear down the tissues and loosen the teeth.

Many people are unaware of their clenching or grinding habits until they result in jaw pain. A dentist may be able to detect the problem before the teeth are permanently damaged.

Anyone who suspects that an injury has damaged the teeth should see a dentist as soon as possible. Sports injuries, accidents, and falls, for example, can cause dental damage.



Injuries sustained as a result of contact sports may cause loose teeth.

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## Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is a disease that causes the bones to weaken and become porous. As a result, even minor bumps and impacts can lead to broken bones.

While osteoporosis commonly affects the spine, hips, and wrists, it can also damage the bones in the jaw that support the teeth.

If the jaw bones become less dense, the teeth may loosen and fall out. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) in the U.S. also report a possible link between bone loss and an increased risk of gum disease.

Certain medications used to treat osteoporosis can cause dental health problems, though this is uncommon. In rare cases, drugs called bisphosphonates, which help to treat bone loss, can lead to loose teeth. This is known as osteonecrosis of the jaw.

Authors of one study suggest that osteonecrosis rarely occurs in people who are taking bisphosphonates in pill form, but that the condition may develop in people who receive the medication intravenously.

Trauma and surgical procedures, such as tooth extraction, can also cause osteonecrosis.

## Prevention

Loose teeth cannot always be prevented, but a person can take steps to reduce the risk. Tips for tooth and gum health include:

- brushing the teeth thoroughly twice a day
- flossing once a day
- refraining from smoking
- attending dental checkups and cleanings as often as recommended
- wearing a properly fitted mouth guard while playing sports
- wearing a bite splint, when nighttime grinding or clenching is an issue
- asking a doctor about calcium and vitamin D supplementation to help prevent osteoporosis
- keeping diabetes under control, as diabetes is a risk factor for gum disease
- being aware of medications that may affect the teeth

# Treatment options for a loose tooth

A range of treatments can help, and the best option will depend on the cause of the looseness.

Treatments include:

- **Scaling and root planing.** This is a type of deep cleaning procedure that can treat and help to reverse gum disease.
- **Medications or mouth rinses.** These can help infected gums to heal and combat bacteria in the mouth.
- **Surgery.** The aim will be to remove inflamed gum tissue and bone that has been damaged by gum disease.
- **Bone grafts.** These can help to rebuild bone lost to gum disease.
- **Soft tissue grafts.** Also known as gum grafts, these can prevent further gum or tooth loss in people with gum disease.
- **Dental appliances, such as bite splints.** These can reduce damage from grinding and may help the mouth to heal after dental surgery.
- **Treatment for diabetes.** Appropriate treatment is important for dental health.



A retainer or bite guard may help prevent tooth grinding.

If a loose tooth falls out, a dentist can often restore a person's smile with:

- **A dental bridge.** This type of crown fits over the teeth on either side of the missing tooth. The result is a bridge between two healthy teeth, connected by a prosthetic, or artificial, tooth in the place of the one that is missing.
- **A dental implant.** This involves an artificial tooth and root, which is connected to the jawbone.

While these options are effective, it is essential to treat the underlying cause of tooth loss and take any other steps needed to prevent further damage.

## Outlook

For an adult, a loose tooth can be alarming. However, the tooth can sometimes be saved, especially when the problem is detected early.

If a tooth is lost or must be removed, a number of restorative methods can give the appearance of a natural tooth.

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