The holiday season—
A time for dental emergencies

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The holiday season is a time for celebration and gatherings of family, friends and colleagues. How can we forget staying up a bit late, eating tons of good food and having a couple of drinks too? For dentists, however, it is not uncommon to receive a frantic call or e-mail on Christmas Eve, for example, from a person who is in unbearable pain and needs urgent treatment.

In these cases, the issue is usually either a root canal flare up, or an infected and impacted wisdom tooth. One incident that is still fresh in my memory is of a young lady who was in Germany for the holidays several years ago. She had a root canal infection but all the dental clinics there were closed from Christmas Eve to Boxing Day. She was popping painkillers every three hours and even chewed on her baby daughter’s pacifier to relieve the pain.

As she was a family friend, she sent me an e-mail and asked if we at Specialist Dental Group could assist. My staff explored the possibility of couriering medication over to her but it would have taken too long. In the end, she cut short her trip and flew to Singapore to have root canal treatment. Owing to the treatment, she was finally pain-free and ready to party well before New Year’s Eve.

Over the last few years, our team has encountered a few interesting emergency situations as a result of the holiday season celebrations. For example, we were called in to attend to dental emergencies as a result of people walking into glass doors after a night of drinking. I remember one seeing this elegant young couple in the middle of the night because the woman was a little drunk and she hit the glass door after losing her balance on her stiletto shoes.

In cases like that, the net outcome is usually as follows—the reinforced glass door stays intact and the teeth, lips, and, sometimes even the nose, get the brunt of the damage. We have certainly stitched up enough lips and fixed many teeth as a result of that.

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Christmas delicacies like turkey, ham, nuts and chocolate are great for our palate but they are challenges to our teeth. On more than one occasion, we have had people showing up because they had their teeth chipped owing to biting hard nuts, nutshells, and hidden pieces of bone in a big chunk of turkey.

Veneers and braces have also been known to be dislodged due to the food being consumed.

After the holiday season, we also have a lot of people presenting with gum problems. Overworked teeth and gums combined with less time for tooth-brushing is an almost perfect formula for acute periodontal abscesses.

One pattern that I have observed over the years is that when it comes to dental emergencies during the holiday season, there is no pattern at all; anything and everything can happen. As a result, we try to ensure that at least one member of our dental team is available to stand by should a dental emergency occur during the festivities.

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