

Endodontic Mishaps

When they occur, Endodontic mishaps such as instrument breakage or perforation can be extremely stressful for the patient and dentist. The following suggestions may be useful in mitigating the initial stress and subsequent problems for you and your patient.

Informed Consent:

Informing your patient about potential treatment mishaps and their consequences should begin prior to treatment. Informed consent is a necessity in today's overly litigious world. If you perform Endodontic therapy in your practice, you should consider utilizing a standard Endodontic consent form. It is also a wise practice to review this form and ask for your patient's questions prior to requesting their signature. If specific potential problems become evident during your pre-treatment evaluation (calcification, dilacerations, etc.) they should be discussed prior to treatment. Your discussion of these specific issues should be documented in the patient chart.

If you would like a copy of the consent form used by NTEA, please contact our office and we will gladly send you one.

What do I tell my patient when a mishap has occurred?

Severing an instrument or perforating a tooth does not constitute negligence, however, failing to inform the patient once such an event has occurred does. As is usually the case when unexpected mishaps occur, honesty is the best policy.

It is best to inform the patient of the exact nature of the mishap, it's possible consequences, and the anticipated treatment required to correct the problem. Be sure to allow enough time to thoroughly answer all your patient's questions. Your conversation with the patient should be accurately documented in the patient's chart.

Should I refer the patient to an endodontist?

Only you can answer this question. Your decision should be based on your skill level in repairing endodontic mishaps (instrument removal, perforation repair). If you decide that referral is in the patient's best interest, it is a good idea to call the endodontist's office to schedule the patient's appointment. Personally calling the specialist's office will allow you to fully explain the nature of the mishap.

Your communication with the endodontist is perhaps the single most important action that will insure a happy patient.

Aftermath:

It has been our observation at NTEA that the degree to which any practitioner is successful in retaining a satisfied patient following a treatment mishap is directly related to their forthrightness and involvement in insuring a satisfactory treatment outcome. If handled in this manner, many of these patients will happily remain in your practice for a lifetime.

Endo Fax is produced by North Texas Endodontic Associates, Dr. David Witherspoon, Dr. Ron Wright, Dr. Gary Harris, and Dr. Joel Small, and is intended to aid the practitioner in the management of endodontic conditions. Practitioners must always use their own best professional judgment. We neither expressly or implicitly warrant any positive results associated with this material.