

## Do You Have A Cracked Tooth?

Do you feel a sharp pain when you bite down or release biting pressure? Does it quickly disappear so you ignore it, even though it happens repeatedly? Do you avoid certain foods or chew on only one side of your mouth? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you may have a cracked tooth.

Even though your pain may only be intermittent, it's important to tell your dentist that you're having these symptoms. Over time, cracks can worsen and affect the pulp deep inside the tooth. If the pulp becomes inflamed or infected, the tooth may need root canal treatment. If a crack becomes too severe, the tooth may need to be extracted.

## What Causes Cracks In Teeth?

A crack is a defect in the tooth structure. It appears as a tiny hairline fracture, usually running vertically along the tooth. Sometimes cracks are invisible to the naked eye and do not even show up on x-rays. Factors that can cause or contribute to cracks include:

- **Accidents that result in a blow to the mouth;**
- **Tooth grinding or uneven chewing pressures;**
- **Loss of tooth structure from a large cavity, filling or other restoration;**
- **Temperature extremes such as eating hot food and then drinking ice water;**  
**and**
- **Chewing on hard objects or food such as ice, nuts or hard candy.**

## How Can You tell If A Tooth Is Cracked?

Sometimes it's difficult. It may be hard to tell which tooth hurts or even if the pain is coming from a top or bottom tooth. Paying attention to various sensations, such as sensitivity to temperature or whether pain occurs when chewing, will help the dentist determine the cause. Sometimes your dentist may need to perform special tests to help you find the painful tooth.

## How Is A Cracked Tooth Treated?

A restoration that covers the entire tooth and holds it together, such as a crown, is one possible treatment. Root canal treatment may also be necessary. Severely cracked teeth must sometimes be extracted and replaced with bridges, denture or implants.

## Why Does A Cracked Tooth Hurt?

The pressure of biting opens the crack, allowing the pulp within the tooth to become irritated. When the bite is released, the crack quickly closes, resulting in sharp pain. If the pulp is irritated by a crack, the tooth may become sensitive to temperature extremes. Some extensive cracks may even irritate the gum tissue around the tooth.

Tiny cracks are common and usually do not cause problems. Regular dental checkups will allow your dentist to check for cracks that have the potential of creating problems. If you have pain with chewing or have any concerns about a possible crack, talk with your dentist.