

CRACKED TOOTH SYNDROME



WHAT?

Cracked tooth syndrome is a term that describes recurring discomfort, sensitivity, or pain that is caused by an incomplete fracture or crack in a tooth. The fracture involved in cracked tooth syndrome is often difficult to detect and may be completely invisible to the naked eye. It may not even appear on an x-ray.

HOW?

As your teeth age, they may lose some of their original strength. Clenching and grinding, for instance, can weaken teeth. Large fillings and root canal treatment can also cause your teeth to lose strength and make them brittle. Every day, your teeth endure a tremendous amount of pressure from biting and chewing, so if you bite down on a hard object like a piece of ice or a popcorn kernel, the force can sometimes cause a tooth to crack, especially if it's already weakened.

SYMPTOMS?

You may have cracked tooth syndrome if:

- you find yourself chewing on only one side of your mouth because it's uncomfortable to chew on the other side;
- your teeth are sensitive to hot or cold temperatures, or to sweet or sour foods;
- you feel a sharp pain when you bite down;
- or the pain you feel is intermittent, rather than constant.

TREATMENTS

To diagnose cracked tooth syndrome, we'll first perform a thorough exam of your mouth and teeth, focusing on the area that's painful. We'll usually take x-rays, which may or may not reveal the fracture, and we'll analyze your bite to isolate the problem. Once we've identified the fractured portion of your tooth, the treatment we'll use depends on the location and direction of the crack, as well as the extent of the damage. If the crack affects only the outer enamel layer of your tooth, we'll remove the affected portion and restore the tooth with a crown or onlay to stabilize it and protect it from further damage.



A small crack in the tooth



Crack widens when teeth bite down

If the crack affects the underlying dentin or pulp layers, however, you'll need more complicated treatment, such as root canal therapy, before we can place a crown.

In rare cases, a crack extends all the way through the tooth and under the bone. In these cases, there is no way to restore the tooth, and we have no other option besides removing the tooth. Fortunately, most cracked teeth can be saved. The key is to find the crack early in its development and treat it appropriately.