

Crowning a Cracked Tooth

When a tooth is cracked, it's often best to protect it by placing a crown to protect the tooth and prevent it from breaking.

Symptoms of a cracked tooth

You may have a cracked tooth if you experience any of these symptoms:

- Your tooth is sensitive to hot or cold temperatures, or to sweet or sour foods.
- You sometimes feel a sharp pain when you chew.
- The pain is intermittent rather than constant.

Some teeth look cracked, but may not be a problem. One kind of hairline crack, called a "craze," occurs over time in the enamel layer of the tooth, and they may not require immediate treatment.



Some cracks aren't a problem



Cracks next to fillings may break



Crowns strengthen and protect

Why do teeth crack?

Teeth can crack for a number of reasons. One is that they endure a tremendous amount of pressure from biting and chewing every day, and as teeth age, they may lose some of their original strength. The heavy stresses of clenching and grinding can also weaken teeth.

Teeth also lose strength when tooth structure is lost, as with root canal therapy or large areas of decay. Teeth can easily break off when the crack is next to large fillings. Chewing on ice, unpopped popcorn, hard candy, and other hard objects can weaken teeth, and these habits can fracture teeth that are already weak. And finally, teeth can crack or fracture because of an injury or accident.

Diagnosis and treatment

We recommend that you see us for an exam if you think you have a cracked tooth, even if it doesn't hurt. The exam typically includes x-rays. However, x-rays don't always reveal a crack, so we may also analyze your bite to isolate the problem.

It's important to evaluate and treat cracks as soon as possible because they can grow quickly. If a crack reaches the tooth's nerve, bacteria can infect the tooth, and root canal therapy may be required to save it. If the crack extends to the root, the tooth may need to be extracted.

To prevent a cracked tooth from breaking and to seal out bacteria and infection, we often recommend placing a crown over the tooth. There are several types of crowns, including gold, porcelain fused to metal, and porcelain. If your tooth needs a crown, we'll talk with you about the best kind for your situation.