

Cracked Tooth Syndrome

Cracked tooth syndrome is a term we use to describe the recurring discomfort, sensitivity, or pain that is caused by an incomplete fracture or crack in a tooth.

Symptoms of cracked tooth syndrome

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

- 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 chew.
- The pain is intermittent rather than constant.



X-rays are part of the diagnosis



Restoring a cracked tooth

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, such as with decay, large fillings, and root canal therapy. 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

To diagnose cracked tooth syndrome, we'll perform a thorough exam of your mouth and teeth. Since tooth fractures are almost always invisible to the naked eye, the exam typically includes x-rays. However, it's possible that the x-rays may not reveal the crack, so we may also analyze your bite to isolate the problem.

Once we've identified the fractured portion of your tooth, the treatment 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. If the crack affects the underlying dentin or pulp layers, however, the tooth will need root canal therapy before we can place a crown.

In rare cases, the crack extends all the way through the tooth and under the jawbone. In these cases, there is no way to restore the tooth, and we must remove it. Fortunately, with early diagnosis and treatment, most cracked teeth can be saved and your healthy smile restored.