

POND SQUARE DENTAL

PATIENT INFORMATION

TREATING CRACKED, FRACTURED, AND CHIPPED TEETH

CRACKED TEETH

A crack in a tooth is a hairline fracture that is incomplete, such that the tooth is still in one piece. The crack may or may not be visible, and if it is visible it will likely already be extensive. The crack can run along the length of the tooth, or horizontally across the tooth, or there may be a combination of both with several cracks in one tooth. No type of crack is good. The tooth may need treatment, the cause of the crack should be identified and addressed.

Typically, there will be periods where you catch the tooth in a certain way or with a certain food, and feel a reaction in the tooth, sometimes acute and sharp, other times not. The tooth may be sensitive to cold and sometimes hot. It may be hard for you to locate where the symptoms are coming from, and often upper and lower are mixed up. There may be no symptoms, or periods with little or no symptoms. You may never be aware there is a problem until it is too late to restore the tooth. If left untreated the crack will progress until the tooth fractures, at which point it may or may not be possible to repair the tooth. Along the way the crack may extend into the nerve complex of the tooth, and the nerve and blood supply to the tooth will be disrupted.

Cracked teeth should be restored with a crown or onlay (a partial crown). If the crack extends into the nerve of the tooth, the tooth will need to be treated with a root filling before a crown is placed on the tooth. If a root filling is needed, a core or body of filling will also be required.

When the crack is too extensive, the tooth will need to be removed as soon as possible. In many cases it is not possible to determine the extent of the crack. This means that you may have remedial treatment, and at some time in the short to medium term the tooth will still need to be removed.

When treating cracked teeth, care has to be taken to assess the reasons for the tooth cracking. Common contributing factors are tooth grinding or clenching habits, large fillings, and teeth oddly positioned in the bite. These factors should be addressed at the time of treatment, and you may need other treatment such as a bite guard (if you are grinding or clenching), investigating other teeth for cracks, or assessing your bite and making planned changes to help reduce the risk of other teeth cracking.

LOVE YOUR SMILE

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CHIPPED TEETH

A chip is where part or all of a crack is complete and so part of a tooth has come off. Chips are smaller by definition, and can sometimes be repaired with filling material. Other times you may need a crown or veneer to restore the tooth.

The reason for a chip should be identified to help ensure the correct remedial treatment is found and lasts as long as possible. Common reasons for chips include chewing habits (nails, pens, playing wind instruments etc), grinding or clenching habits, erosive tooth wear (which thins the teeth so they are fragile), trauma, and weak teeth or teeth with large fillings.

Other treatment may then be required, such as a bite guard, or making changes to the way your teeth meet.

FRACTURED TEETH

A fracture is when a crack has become complete through the tooth, but a larger part of the tooth has come away.

Often fractures are more complex to deal with. The fracture may run across the nerve chamber of a tooth, so requiring a root filling. The edge of the fracture may be under the gum line, meaning gum surgery is required or perhaps the tooth will not be restorable. A fracture extending to the root of a tooth usually means the tooth cannot be restored.

Options for restoration need to be assessed on an individual basis. The size and position of the fracture, the size and position of the tooth, the way your teeth come together (the bite or occlusion), and any habits all need to be taken into consideration.

REPLACING CRACKED TEETH THAT CAN'T BE RESTORED

In the unfortunate instance where a tooth cannot be restored, the tooth will need to be removed, usually the sooner this should happen as soon as possible as, if left, some replacement options could become more complicated or precluded.

Replacement options include:

Implants

Bridges

Dentures

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PROTECTING YOUR TEETH FROM CRACKS, CHIPS, AND FRACTURES

Cracks, chips and fractures are caused by trauma. This can be single impact or repeated.

The aetiology or underlying cause needs to be identified and understood. Measures can then be set out to reduce the risk and rate of cracking.

High risk or high contact sports may require specialist sports guards.

Tooth grinding or clenching habits, which are stress related and habitual, may require multi-faceted approaches, including dietary changes, splints or bite guards, muscle thinning treatments, or advice on seeking help to deal with stressful situations.

Issues with the way teeth are set up when biting together may mean there is increased pressure on a single or multiple teeth, and making simple adjustments may provide quick resolution, or orthodontic treatment may be needed. Building up some teeth with filling material or concealed gold or ceramic backings may help shift damaging grinding patterns away from back teeth and so significantly reducing the risk of further cracks. In some cases the treatment may be more complex or involved.

Often there is no single cause, and multiple aspects need to be taken into consideration.

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