

CRACKED TOOTH SYNDROME

TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT



WHY DO TEETH CRACK?

Cracked tooth syndrome is a common problem. Like all materials, teeth are subject to the forces of stress fatigue. Patients who grind their teeth, eat popcorn and munch on ice are particularly vulnerable. Grinding can increase the stress and strain on a tooth by 200-300%. Cracks often develop around teeth that have fillings due to unsupported tooth structure.

WHAT TYPE OF SYMPTOMS ARE COMMON?

The tooth is often sensitive to pressure and or temperature. As the tooth is pushed on, it flexes and stimulates the nerve. The pain is often more noticeable after releasing the bite pressure on the tooth. The nerve can become aggravated by the crack and by bacteria leaking into it. The pulp becomes inflamed and sometimes more sensitive to hot and cold.

WHAT'S THE USUAL TREATMENT FOR A CRACKED TOOTH?

Unless the crack is immobilized, the tooth usually deteriorates. The best solution is to bind the tooth together with a crown. A crown covers the entire tooth helping to stop the existing crack from spreading down the root into a vertical fracture that is untreatable. If there is pulpal sensitivity, a temporary crown may be placed on the involved tooth. It is re-evaluated in two to four weeks for pain or sensitivity. A good indication of the need for a root canal is if the tooth remains symptomatic after placing a temporary crown on it. Even with ideal treatment 10% of cracked teeth have nerves that go on to die.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF THE NERVE DOESN'T RECOVER?

Sometimes the crack allows bacteria to enter the nerve and causes it to die. This may not cause symptoms at first, but can flare up in the future and cause pain and swelling. A root canal or endodontic therapy would then be indicated. Root canal treatment is 95% successful. However, if you end up losing your tooth there are several options for replacement. These options include a bridge, an implant which supports a crown, or a removable partial denture.