

Cracked Tooth Syndrome

Craze lines

Most adult teeth have craze lines and luckily these cause few problems. They are tiny cracks that only affect the outer enamel of the tooth, are painless and rarely develop into a true crack.

Fractured cusp



When a tooth becomes weakened due to an existing filling or new decay, a fracture of the cusp may result. This type of fracture tends to have the best prognosis provided the break doesn't go too far below the gum line. The tooth can normally be restored with a filling or crown.

Hairline crack (Cracked Tooth Syndrome)



A hairline crack is a fairly common occurrence and mainly occurs on the biting surface of the tooth between two cusps or underneath an existing filling. Sometimes it can be linked to a painful episode of biting on some hard food but often there is no preceding factor.

Symptoms include hot & cold sensitivity and pain when biting. These symptoms are due to flexing of the dentine and inflammation of the underlying pulp (nerve) as bacteria are 'pumped' into the crack. The crack can slowly propagate (spread) just like a crack in glass.

Depending on the direction of the crack, it may reach the pulp of the tooth causing the tooth to die or go off to the side of the tooth and eventually weaken the cusp causing it to break off (fractured cusp).

Unfortunately for you and for us, predicting the course of a hairline crack can be very difficult. Very occasionally the tooth may seem to get better, but in reality the crack tends to deepen over time. This is particularly the case if you already have a history of grinding or clenching your teeth.

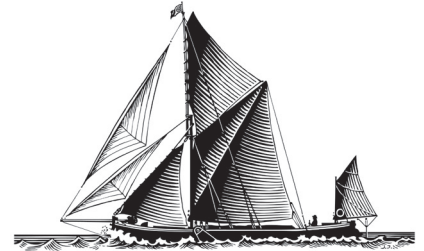
The treatment decision is to either try and 'hold' the crack together with a tooth coloured filling or crown, or to carry out a root canal filling. This all depends on the size and progress of the crack and this often only becomes clear as each treatment is performed and its success is assessed. If the first, most conservative treatment is not successful then we progress to the next.

Despite restorative treatment such as crowning, about 10% of cracked teeth still give symptoms, and in some cases the pulp eventually goes on to die. Root canal treatment can be effective in many cases, but sometimes the crack also extends into the supporting tissues around the root. Reinfection via this outward facing crack means that the tooth ultimately requires extraction.



Split tooth

A split tooth is sometimes the result of an untreated cracked tooth. It can be identified by a cracked tooth with distinct segments which may be mobile. A split tooth normally requires extraction.



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Main Points

- Unfortunately, fractured teeth do not heal themselves like other bones in your body
- Crowning can be successful for mild to moderate cracks because it immobilises the crack, protecting it against the powerful chewing forces
- Cracks and fractures can not be seen on x-rays. Often we need to remove a filling to see the crack. Even then it can be impossible to know how deep or shallow the crack is
- A small crack can normally be 'fixed' but a bigger one often leads to the need for root canal treatment or even extraction. Early treatment is therefore recommended