

YOUR SMILE & ORAL HEALTH



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHIPPED, CRACKED, & FRACTURED TEETH

If you asked people to name the hardest substance in their body, most would say it is their bones. However, that response is incorrect. The right answer is that dental enamel, which makes up the outermost visible layer of your teeth, is the strongest material in the body.



While Mother Nature has wisely designed your teeth to withstand the tremendous force of biting into hard foods, and has insulated the inner nerve supply from the temperature extremes of hot or cold food and beverages, they are far from totally invincible. As protective and durable as your outer dental enamel is, the teeth can still be damaged by erosion, decay or a traumatic injury. Furthermore, unlike your bones, dental enamel is not a living tissue that can repair itself and heal.

The fact of the matter is, that it is not uncommon for a tooth to sustain a chip, crack or fracture. It may happen simply from biting down on a piece of ice, chewing on a pencil, or sustaining trauma such as a direct blow to the face and mouth. Whatever the case may be, the damage to your teeth can range from a defect as minor as a small chip of the dental enamel to a more extensive fracture and even a displaced or completely knocked out tooth. It is also important to keep in mind, that a tooth's susceptibility to fracture and breakage can be increased by untreated dental decay that weakens and compromises its structural integrity.

There are many different types of chips, cracks, and fractures that can affect your teeth. The extent of the damage that it causes will determine how the tooth should be restored, if it can be saved, as well as the type of symptoms you will most likely experience. In cases where too much tooth structure, or the root has also been compromised, an extraction may be necessary. However, in the majority of cases the damage can be treated and the tooth fully restored.

Cracked and fractured teeth can be classified into five categories:

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- **Craze Lines:** These minor cracks are very common in adults. Typically, craze lines are not treated, as they are a minor shallow imperfection and will cause you zero discomfort
- **Fractured Cusp:** When you fracture a cusp you have broken part of the chewing surface of your tooth. Chewing with a fractured cusp can cause discomfort. In some situations a large fracture will affect the nerve of your tooth and necessitate a root canal procedure. You may need a dental crown.
- **Cracked Tooth:** This is crack that extends down from the chewing surface of your tooth toward the root. In some cases the crack may go below the gum line into the root. Damage to the nerve is common. Left untreated a cracked tooth can get worse and result in the loss of your tooth.
- **Split Tooth:** In a split tooth the crack completely divides the tooth into two segments. The position and extent of the crack determines whether any portion of your tooth can in fact be saved.
- **Vertical Root Fracture:** This is a crack that begins in the root of the tooth and extends up toward the chewing surface of the tooth. In most instances a tooth with a vertical root fracture will require extraction



Of course, the most important thing to remember is that if you chip, crack, or fracture your tooth, you need to see your dentist for immediate care. With all of the treatment options available today, the majority of teeth that have sustained one of these injuries can be saved, and cosmetically restored to both function well and to look completely natural.