

CRACKED TOOTH SYNDROME

WHY DO TEETH GET CRACKS? Cracked tooth Syndrome is a very common problem usually affecting teeth that are heavily filled. Decay and subsequent fillings and stress fatigue caused by grinding or clenching can cause a weakening of the remaining tooth structure and hairline fractures can develop.

WHY DOES IT HURT TO BITE ON? As the tooth flexes microscopically, the nerve is stimulated. There are tiny fluid filled tubes (tubules) which are situated in the dentine (the next layer of tooth under the enamel). These tubules run down to the nerve and as the tooth flexes, the crack opens and closes, causing fluid to push and pull on the sensitive nerve.

WHY IS IT SOMETIMES SENSITIVE TO HOT AND COLD? The nerve is aggravated by the crack and by the bacteria (which we all have present in our mouths) being pumped into it via the tubules. It becomes inflamed because of the toxins in the bacteria. A classic symptom of nerve inflammation is excessive sensitivity to hot and cold.

DOES GRINDING MY TEETH MAKE IT WORSE? Yes, and grinding is a very common habit. Almost every person at some time in their life will grind their teeth, usually due to stress. Unknown to you, grinding at night causes a massive increase (200-300%) on teeth. You may benefit from a night-guard or a permanent addition to your canines to protect the back teeth from cracking.

IF I DO NOTHING, WHAT WILL HAPPEN? The crack continues to slowly propagate (spread), like a crack in glass. Sometimes the crack goes off to the side and a fragment of tooth breaks off. The crack can also go deep into the root and at times into the nerve. It is not a good idea to leave a cracked tooth. A small crack can be treated effectively, but a larger crack can lead to Root Canal Treatment or even loss of the tooth completely if it breaks undesirably and is unable to be restored. This can result in severe pain caused by an abscess and cannot always effectively be controlled by pain relief or antibiotics.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO TREAT CRACKED TOOTH SYNDROME? Unless the crack is immobilized, the tooth is very likely to deteriorate. Although various methods can be used to hold the tooth together, chewing forces are extremely powerful and these 'patch up' treatments can be ineffective. The only real solution is to bind the whole tooth together with a crown which is like a barrel over a weakened stump so that chewing force moves the tooth as a whole, rather than splitting it apart.

IS THERE A GUARANTEE THAT THE NERVE WILL RECOVER? NO. Despite the best treatment about 10% of cracked teeth will have nerves that go on to die. This is because the tooth can still move slightly within the bone and this slight movement can flex the crack underneath, despite the crown on top. There are occasions where the bacterial damage is so substantial; the nerve dies regardless of what we do. This can happen soon after the crown is placed or many years down the track. Early treatment is therefore recommended to minimise the size of the crack and prolong the life of the tooth.