

Cracked teeth: What do you do?

When we crack or chip our teeth, we often blame it on eating the wrong foods, such as sticky candy or popcorn. But in fact, the food may not be entirely responsible for the fracture. Sticky candy may accelerate the crack, but the tooth may have fractured because of its weakened condition. For example, a tooth with a large existing restoration in it—such as a filling or root canal—is weaker than a tooth that has not been restored.

There are a number of reasons why a tooth may crack, including tooth decay, trauma or injury, a weakened tooth structure, grinding of the teeth or a stress fracture. In some cases, the tooth simply can't withstand the strong muscles of the jaw and will fracture when an individual bites down on food. One way to protect the teeth from trauma is to wear a mouthguard during sports. Your dentist can fit you with a custom mouthguard. Taking proper care of the teeth and regular visits to the dentist will help keep your teeth in good shape.

What should you do if a tooth cracks?

Cracking the tooth may be painful if the nerve is exposed, and the area may become tender. The Chicago Dental Society and the American Dental Association recommend that you rinse your mouth with warm water to clean the area and apply a cold compress to the mouth to reduce swelling. Call your dentist immediately.

How are cracked teeth repaired?

The first step may be to buff down the tooth if it has a razor-sharp edge. Treatment may vary depending on where the tooth has fractured, how close it is to the nerve and the overall condition of the tooth. A cracked tooth may be repaired with a restorative material, such as silver alloy, gold, porcelain or plastic (a filling), a crown or overlay (partial crown) or through a process called bonding, which includes applying porcelain or enamel to the fractured tooth. Your dentist will advise you on the best way to preserve the tooth.

What happens if you knock out a tooth?

If a tooth is knocked out, retrieve it immediately. Hold the tooth by the crown and rinse off the root of the tooth if dirty. Do not scrub it or remove any tissue fragments. If possible, put the tooth back in the socket or in a container of milk or cool water. Call your dentist immediately.