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### **Do You Have A Cracked Tooth?**

When you bite down you feel a sharp pain. It quickly disappears and perhaps you ignore it. You avoid certain foods or chew on one side of your mouth. Does this sound familiar? You may have a cracked tooth.

A cracked tooth can result from many causes. An accident, such as a blow to the mouth, grinding and clenching your teeth, an uneven chewing pressure or stress on a tooth may lead to a crack. Teeth that have a significant portion of tooth structure through aging, wear or large fillings may be brittle and susceptible to cracking. Exposing tooth enamel to extreme changes in temperature, such as eating hot food and drinking ice water, and chewing on hard objects or food such as nuts can contribute to cracking.

A crack may appear as a hairline fracture, running vertically along the tooth. A crack often is invisible to the eye and may not show on an x-ray, which can make the diagnosis difficult. You may not even be able to tell which tooth hurts or whether the pain is from a top or bottom tooth.

You can help your dentist determine which tooth is causing the problem by noting when and where you have sensitivity to heat or cold, to sweet, sour or sticky food and approximately where the pain is when you are chewing.

A cracked tooth may hurt because the pressure of biting causes the crack to open. When you stop biting, the pressure is released and a sharp pain results as the crack quickly closes.

Even though the crack may be microscopic, when it opens, the pulp inside the tooth may become irritated. The pulp is a soft tissue that contains the tooth's nerves and blood vessels. If the crack irritates the pulp, the tooth may become sensitive to temperature extremes. If the pulp becomes damaged or diseased as a result of the crack, root canal treatment may be necessary to save the tooth.

Depending on the size and location of the crack, your dentist may restore the tooth with bonding, an onlay, or a crown. A severely cracked tooth may need extraction. Your dentist will determine the best treatment for you.

Tiny cracks are common and usually do not cause problems. Regular dental checkups are important. They allow your dentist to diagnose and treat problems in the early stages. If you continue to have pain, avoid chewing on that side of your mouth and call your dentist.