

# Cracks...no simple answer

Cracked teeth, although extremely common, are one of the biggest enigmas in dentistry. Although modern diagnostic techniques, such as magnification and transillumination (shining light through the tooth to observe light deflection by a crack), have made it easier to identify fractures early, it is often impossible to identify a fracture that may start from underneath a filling before significant symptoms appear. Furthermore, a general consensus about how to treat dental fractures among dentists does not exist.

Some dentists choose to “watch” fractures until the patient complains of pain from the tooth. Others recommend crowns for all teeth with fractures. Still others suggest placing a bonded restoration in the tooth to see how it responds. I’ve even heard famous dental speakers say that every tooth with a crack should probably have root canal treatment. Quite frankly, however, every case is different, and there is no



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right or wrong solution. In my practice, I have suggested all of the above approaches to my patients, depending on their individual situation.

It is important to understand that there are many types of dental fractures. For simplicity, let’s just look at the two most common: vertical and horizontal. Horizontal fractures, if you have to choose, are probably the best type of crack to have because they usually result in a fractured off cusp or part of the tooth that can be rebuilt with a restoration. However, horizontal cracks often start from the base of a filling and propagate outward. Therefore, they are very difficult to diagnose. Vertical cracks raise the most concern in my mind because they can often clearly be seen on the outside of a tooth and propa-

gate down through the root. These fractures, if left untreated, will ultimately result in the loss of a tooth.

The problem with a cracked tooth is that when it starts hurting, it is often too late because that means that the pulp (“nerve”) has become involved. The exception to this is when a horizontal fracture is starting, the tooth may be sensitive at times and not at others; they behave erratically, so the diagnosis is often missed on the first attempt. Regardless of what the recommendation for dental treatment is, a diagnosed fracture should not be taken lightly, even if it does not hurt.

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*For questions about dental health or to schedule a complementary consultation, call 330-364-2011, visit [www.doctorhuff.net](http://www.doctorhuff.net), or ask your regular dentist.*

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