

# Cracked Teeth: A bigger issue than you realize

You might think that cracked teeth are relatively rare, but the truth is that they are very common. Studies have shown that about two-thirds of people have a cracked tooth, and

most of them are completely unaware of it. A cracked tooth is the third most common cause of tooth loss, after gum disease and tooth decay. The biggest issue is that most people assume

that a cracked tooth would hurt to chew on, be temperature sensitive, or at least have some symptoms associated with it. But the reality is that most cracked teeth are asymptomatic until it is too late and have led to bigger issues.

It's important to be aware of how common and destructive tooth cracks are. Hopefully, it will help you understand why it's so important to have regular dental checkups. These timely visits allow dentists and hygienists the opportunity to identify cracked teeth early, before they become too damaging.

### How common are cracked teeth?

Probably the best estimates out there are from a study in a 2013 report that examined thousands of teeth looking for cracks. Researchers in this study found that:

- 31.4% of molars had one or more cracks
- 66.1% of people had at least one cracked molar
- 46.2% had multiple cracked molars

- Just 10% experienced symptoms related to their cracked molar

### Who's at risk for cracked teeth?

Obviously, if two thirds of individuals have at least one cracked tooth, most people are at risk for a cracked tooth. But there are some things that are going to put you at greater risk. Metal amalgam fillings can crack your teeth. They expand when exposed to hot temperature foods and from the stresses placed on this material while eating. This expansion pushes on your enamel, which can lead to cracks (see photo). People with bite issues like TMJ disorders or people who clench or grind their teeth are more likely to crack their teeth. Patients with TMJ disorders frequently have destructive, worn-down bites which forces their lower jaw backwards. This backwards positioning can increase the degree of blockage of a person's airway while they sleep, which can lead to obstructive sleep apnea. Furthermore, a person with an obstructed airway may clench and grind their teeth, which can wear down the teeth and deteriorate the bite.

These conditions can cause you to put excessive force on your teeth, making them more likely to crack. If you are having continual problems with cracking teeth, this may be a sign that you are clenching or grinding at night or are suffering from one of the conditions mentioned. Protecting your teeth at night with a bite guard or sleep appliance could be the best thing you could do for yourself if this is the case.



Dentally Speaking

by Jeffrey S. Haddad D.D.S.

**Treating cracked teeth**  
Restorative dentistry offers many treatment options that can stop cracks in teeth. For extremely small cracks, we might recommend a "wait-and-see" approach. If a tooth has a more severe crack in it, we may recommend a porcelain restoration like an onlay or crown. These restorations adhesively bond the remaining tooth structure together and reinforce the tooth as a whole. If the crack affects the nerve of the tooth, we may recommend root canal therapy prior to the porcelain restoration being placed. Ideally, we identify these teeth early and avoid these costly solutions.

Unfortunately, some cracked teeth cannot be saved. This is usually the case when small cracks progress into more serious ones before the person becomes aware of the crack in the first place. If this does occur, the tooth will then have to be extracted, and the patient has the option of replacing the tooth with a bridge or dental implant. This is a tragic and costly oc-



currence that can be avoided with the proper supervision and recommendations by your dental professional.

Cracked teeth are more common than most people realize, and the truth is that most of these teeth have no symptoms until it is too late.

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### Dr. Haddad - *Continued from page 16*

If it's been a long time since your last checkup, you may have cracked teeth that have not been diagnosed. These teeth may be worsening, which can make it more likely that they can't be repaired or saved. Cracked teeth are signs of bigger bite problems, bad habits, or more serious conditions like TMJ disorders or sleep apnea. If you have experienced cracked teeth in the past, you may want to be evaluated by a dentist who focuses on these bite related issues.

*Jeffrey S. Haddad, DDS of Rochester Advanced Dentistry, completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies.*

*He lectures nationally on cosmetic dentistry, TMJ and sleep disorders and dental implants. For more information, visit [www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com](http://www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com).*