



Fractured/ Broken Teeth

WHAT COULD CAUSE MY TOOTH TO FRACTURE OR BREAK?

There are many reasons your tooth may fracture or break. Some include accident or injury, tooth decay, chewing on hard foods such as ice or candy, grinding your teeth, or loss of natural tooth structure due to a large fillings or wear. An injured tooth may or may not hurt, depending whether the nerve is injured or exposed.

Fractured Tooth

There are three common classifications of tooth fractures. A small fracture may involve the enamel (the hard outer shell of the tooth) only and may not be visible to the human eye—this is often solely a cosmetic issue. Or, a fracture can extend through the enamel and stop at the dentin (the softer tooth layer underneath the enamel), which often results in tooth sensitivity. Lastly, a fracture can extend through all three layers of the tooth to the pulp (the nerve of the tooth). When this happens, noticeable pain and bleeding may occur.

“Hairline” Fractures

Many teeth develop fine lines in the enamel that look like small cracks. These usually run from the top of the tooth to the gumline. Many of these cause no problems and do not get worse over time.

However, if your tooth is sensitive to sweet, sour, hot or cold food, or you experience discomfort while chewing, your tooth may be fractured. A trip to your dentist should help to reveal which tooth is affected and whether it needs repair.

I have a broken tooth: What do I do now?

If your tooth is broken, call your dentist immediately, and try to keep the piece(s) in milk, saliva, saline (salt water) or your cheek until you reach the dentist—your dentist may be able to adhere the piece(s) to the remaining tooth as a temporary fix until further treatment can be applied. In the meantime, rinse your mouth with warm water to clean the area and, if the tooth area is bleeding, apply gauze with pressure to the affected area for 10 minutes or until bleeding stops. Use a cold compress on your cheek or lips to reduce swelling. Take over-the-counter medication for pain and see the dentist immediately.

TREATMENT

Treatment for a fractured or broken tooth can vary from bonding a tooth-colored repair material onto the tooth to root canal treatment and/or a crown. A trip to your dentist right away could save you much time, money and discomfort in the future, as even a tooth injury without painful side effects can worsen over time.

For information on the TRICARE Dental Program, or to find more “Dental Health 911” tips, visit us online at www.TRICAREdentalprogram.com.

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