Cracked Tooth: Causes and Treatment | Core Dental

Canonical: https://www.coredental.com.au/cracked-tooth-treated/

Details:

A cracked tooth can be anything from a fine surface line in the enamel to a break that runs down towards the root. Treatment depends on how deep the crack goes: minor craze lines often need no treatment, while deeper cracks may need a filling, a crown or root canal treatment. At Core Dental we keep appointments for dental emergencies each day where possible, so call us as soon as you can if a tooth is painful or broken. Your dentist will examine the tooth and explain your options.

What does the term "cracked tooth" mean?

A cracked tooth may refer to a crack that only affects the enamel, which is the hard outer layer, or it might affect the entire tooth structure down to the root. Some cracks are shallow and cause no symptoms. Others reach the softer dentine underneath or the nerve (the pulp) at the centre of the tooth, and these can cause pain, sensitivity to hot, cold or sweet things, or discomfort when you bite. Because the outcome depends on how deep and where the crack sits, it needs to be assessed by a dentist rather than judged by how it looks.

What can cause a tooth to crack or break?

A crack or break in a tooth can be caused by:

biting onto something hard

decay (cavities) that weakens the tooth and makes it more likely to break

root canal treatment that has left less tooth structure to support the tooth

old silver or amalgam restorations that place stress on the tooth over time

falling on your face or being hit in the face

grinding or clenching, which places repeated heavy load on teeth

Often more than one factor is involved. Knowing the likely cause helps your dentist suggest ways to protect the tooth after it has been treated.

How is a minor crack or craze line treated?

If it is a minor crack, also known as a craze line, within the outer surface of the tooth, then no treatment is usually necessary. Minor chips off the tooth surface do not always require treatment either. The chipped area may be polished to smooth off any rough edges, or filling material can be used to restore the chipped area, either to prevent further breakdown or for appearance. Your dentist will keep an eye on the tooth at your regular check-ups.

How is a crack treated if it runs through the crown of the tooth?

If a crack extends through the entire crown of the tooth and there has been no nerve involvement or pulp exposure, a filling material or a crown may be used to protect the tooth and prevent the crack from progressing. This helps stabilise the tooth structure and reduce the chance of further damage. You can read more about fillings and restorations and dental crowns on our website.

What treatment is needed if the pulp is exposed?

When the pulp tissue is exposed because of a crack, root canal treatment followed by a crown would be the likely treatment. Root canal therapy removes the affected pulp so the tooth can be kept, and the crown provides protection and structural support afterwards. Not every cracked tooth can be saved. If a crack extends below the gumline or into the root, an extraction may be the only option, and your dentist will talk you through replacement choices if that happens. See our page on root canal therapy for more.

What should you do if you crack or break a tooth?

If you still have the piece of tooth that broke off, bring it with you to the dentist. If you do not, please do not worry, as the tooth can usually still be assessed and restored. Here is what we suggest:

If you are in pain, call us and ask for an emergency appointment as soon as possible.

If you are not in pain, call and book an appointment at your earliest convenience.

Rinse your mouth gently with lukewarm water, and avoid chewing on the affected side.

Do not leave it for too long. A broken tooth left exposed in the mouth can lead to more serious problems, such as infection of the root canal.

Call 000 immediately for uncontrollable bleeding, difficulty breathing or swallowing, or a serious facial injury. For a tooth that has been knocked out completely, see our guide on what to do if a tooth is knocked out .

How can you help prevent a cracked tooth?

Prevention matters. There are some things you can do to reduce the chance of a cracked or broken tooth:

Have regular check-ups, commonly every six months, so your dentist can notice habits such as grinding or clenching, check for cavities and review teeth that may need fillings or crowns.

Ask about a night guard, also called a splint, if you grind or clench at night.

Wear a custom-fitted mouthguard during contact sport.

Avoid biting down on very hard objects such as ice, hard lollies or pen lids.

Our article on dental splints explains how they work.

What does treatment for a broken tooth cost?

Treatment for a broken tooth can be simple or a little more involved. Once we have examined your situation, we will explain what needs to happen next, how the problem will be resolved and what it will cost before treatment starts. A broken tooth can often be repaired with a tooth-coloured composite filling, and our guide figure has been a range of about $150 to $450. If a simple repair cannot be completed on the day, we will place a temporary restoration and explain the further treatment that is needed.

Cost should not stop you seeking treatment for a dental emergency. We offer interest-free payment plans, including Payright (0% interest, fortnightly instalments over 3 to 30 months, plans up to $20,000,

subject to eligibility) and TLC loans ($2,001 to $50,000 over up to 84 months, rate set by credit assessment). Figures published as at September 2026, confirm when you book. Fees, rebates and finance terms can change, so please confirm current terms and what a quoted figure includes before you proceed.

How can we help?

If you have cracked or broken a tooth, call 13 13 16 or book online. Our team can arrange the earliest suitable appointment at one of our nine clinics. Emergency care is described on our emergency dentistry page, and you can find your nearest practice on our Southbank , Epping or Wyndham pages, or any of our other clinic pages.

See someone soon, whether or not it hurts

The most useful published statement about a chipped or cracked tooth is about timing, and it removes pain as the thing to judge by.

The Victorian Department of Health: "Teeth that have been chipped or cracked may or may not be painful. Either way, you should see an oral health professional as soon as possible because early repair can improve the survival of a damaged tooth."

May or may not be painful. Either way. A crack that does not hurt is not a crack that can wait, and the reason given is specific: early repair can improve the survival of the tooth. Not comfort — survival.

If a piece has broken off, keep it properly. "If part of the tooth is broken off and is intact, store it in milk or the saliva of the person with the broken tooth and seal it in a container or plastic wrap, and see an oral health professional as soon as possible."

Milk or saliva, sealed, and not water. The Department's related instruction for a knocked-out tooth is explicit on that point: "Do not use water to rinse or store the knocked-out tooth", and "try not to let the tooth dry out".

If a whole adult tooth has come out, that is a different and more urgent situation. "If an adult (permanent, or secondary) tooth is knocked out, there is a good chance it will survive if it is put back into position straight away, and you seek professional help immediately. Every minute a tooth is out of the gum, the less chance it has of surviving."

Every minute matters, and the Department deliberately gives no deadline — so no one should conclude that a window has closed. Its first aid is: "Stay calm"; "Handle the tooth by the crown (smooth white part that is normally visible), not the root (yellowish pointy part)"; rinse it "in milk or saline for a few seconds" if dirty, or in the person's saliva, avoiding water where possible; put it back "into the hole in the gum (socket)" with the root going in, "only ... if the person is conscious"; have the person "hold the tooth in place by gently biting on something soft, like a tissue or a napkin"; and "assist the person to see an oral health professional immediately".

One critical exception. "Never try to put a baby (deciduous or primary) tooth back in the gum if it is knocked out. This can damage the developing permanent tooth underneath the gum." The Department explains why: "The baby tooth could fuse to the bone, causing problems when it's time for it to fall out naturally, and might affect the growth of the adult tooth, bone and gums."

How to tell them apart: "It can be tricky but baby teeth are smaller, smoother and usually whiter than adult teeth. Children's adult teeth are often more yellow, larger, and can have bumps on their biting edge."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental injuries, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026). Accessed 6 November 2026.

Why a crack is treated as more than a cosmetic chip

A crack matters because of what it lets in, and the published advice connects it directly to the nerve inside the tooth.

Cracks are a listed cause of pulp damage. The Department's causes of damaged or infected pulp include "deep-seated and untreated tooth decay"; "decay beneath a deep filling"; "trauma that damages a tooth"; "habitual tooth grinding (bruxism)"; "long-standing cracks in the teeth" ; and "advanced gum disease".

Long-standing is the operative word. A crack that has been there for years is on the list precisely because time is the mechanism.

What happens then. "Once the pulp becomes infected, it loses its ability to fight the spread of the infection. If bacteria find their way into the pulp chamber, the bacteria will multiply. This can cause an infection or an endodontic abscess (a pocket or 'blister' of pus) when it spreads into the surrounding bone which can become severe." Its complications include bone loss, and loss of the tooth, where "tooth replacement options are available but may be limited if the infection has already caused advanced bone loss."

The symptoms to watch for in a cracked tooth , from the same list: "unprovoked or spontaneous pain"; "sensitivity to hot and cold drinks and foods"; "pain when biting or chewing"; "loosening of the tooth"; "swelling of the gum near the affected tooth"; "oozing of pus surrounding the affected tooth"; "facial swelling". And it can be silent: "Sometimes, tooth pulp may become damaged or diseased without any symptoms."

What repair may involve. A crack is one of the reasons the Department gives for a tooth needing more than a filling after root canal treatment: teeth requiring that treatment "have sometimes lost a lot of tooth structure due to previous decay or cracks and may require further protection in the form of posts, crowns or other similar materials."

On crowns specifically, one of the two stated purposes is structural: a crown "protects the tooth, which may have been weakened by large fillings or decay in the past". Its risks include that preparing the tooth "can get close to the nerve and blood vessels inside the tooth (pulp) and the tooth may need further treatment, like a root canal treatment", and that "it is irreversible; once a tooth is cut for a crown, it will always need a crown."

And on fillings, the honest limit: "Dental fillings cannot completely repair all damage to teeth but may be necessary to maintain the tooth structure and keep teeth doing their important job."

If grinding is part of the picture , the Department's tip for minimising tooth wear is to "wear a custom-made dental splint if you grind your teeth at night" — relevant given that grinding appears both as a cause of pulp damage and as something that compounds acid-softened enamel.

And on prevention, where the advice is unusually direct. "Always wear a mouthguard for all sports and training where there is a risk of mouth injury, such as football, rugby, soccer, basketball, netball, water polo or hockey." It adds: "An oral health professional can make you a professionally fitted mouthguard to give your teeth the best protection."

Note that training is included, not just games.

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental injuries, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 4 August 2026); Root canal treatment, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 14 July 2025); Cosmetic dentistry and teeth whitening, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 12 December 2025); Dental fillings, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 1 August 2025); Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Does a cracked tooth always need treatment?

Not always. Fine craze lines in the outer enamel often need no treatment, and small chips may only need polishing. Deeper cracks usually do need care to stop them spreading. Only a dentist can tell the difference, so it is worth having any painful or changing crack checked.

Can a cracked tooth heal by itself?

Tooth structure does not repair itself the way a broken bone can, so a crack that goes beyond the surface will not close up on its own. A filling, crown or other treatment is used to protect the tooth. Early assessment gives your dentist more options.

What should I do if I crack a tooth at night or on the weekend?

Call us on 13 13 16 and explain what has happened. We open Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings, and keep appointments for emergencies each day where possible. If you have severe swelling, uncontrolled bleeding or difficulty breathing, call 000.

Will I need a crown?

Some cracked teeth do, particularly when the crack runs through the crown of the tooth or after root canal treatment. A crown protects the tooth and holds it together. A smaller crack may only need a filling. Your dentist will recommend what suits your tooth.

Can I get a payment plan for emergency dental work?

Yes. We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans so you can have the work done now and pay over time, subject to eligibility. Figures published as at September 2026, confirm when you book.

My cracked tooth does not hurt. Can it wait?

No, and the published advice addresses that case directly. "Teeth that have been chipped or cracked may or may not be painful. Either way, you should see an oral health professional as soon as possible because early repair can improve the survival of a damaged tooth."

What should I do with a piece that has broken off?

Keep it moist and sealed. "If part of the tooth is broken off and is intact, store it in milk or the saliva of the person with the broken tooth and seal it in a container or plastic wrap, and see an oral health professional as soon as possible."

Should I rinse it in water?

Avoid water. For a knocked-out tooth the Department is explicit: "Do not use water to rinse or store the knocked-out tooth", and "try not to let the tooth dry out".

What if a whole adult tooth is knocked out?

Act immediately. "If an adult (permanent, or secondary) tooth is knocked out, there is a good chance it will survive if it is put back into position straight away, and you seek professional help immediately. Every minute a tooth is out of the gum, the less chance it has of surviving." Handle it "by the crown ... not the root", put it back with the root going into the socket, have the person bite gently on something soft, and get them to an oral health professional immediately.

Is there a time limit after which it is too late?

The Department gives none, and we are not going to invent one. Its whole statement on timing is that "every minute a tooth is out of the gum, the less chance it has of surviving" — which is a reason to hurry, not a deadline that closes.

What if it is a child's baby tooth?

Do not put it back. "Never try to put a baby (deciduous or primary) tooth back in the gum if it is knocked out. This can damage the developing permanent tooth underneath the gum."

How do I tell a baby tooth from an adult one?

"It can be tricky but baby teeth are smaller, smoother and usually whiter than adult teeth. Children's adult teeth are often more yellow, larger, and can have bumps on their biting edge."

Why is a crack more serious than it looks?

Because of what it lets in. "Long-standing cracks in the teeth" is on the Department's list of causes of damaged or infected pulp, and once the pulp is infected "it loses its ability to fight the spread of the infection", which can lead to an abscess, bone loss, or loss of the tooth.

What symptoms should I watch for?

"Unprovoked or spontaneous pain"; "sensitivity to hot and cold drinks and foods"; "pain when biting or chewing"; "loosening of the tooth"; "swelling of the gum near the affected tooth"; "oozing of pus surrounding the affected tooth"; "facial swelling". It can also be silent: "Sometimes, tooth pulp may become damaged or diseased without any symptoms."

Will a filling be enough?

Not always. "Dental fillings cannot completely repair all damage to teeth but may be necessary to maintain the tooth structure and keep teeth doing their important job." Where a lot of structure has been lost, the Department notes that a tooth "may require further protection in the form of posts, crowns or other similar materials".

Could grinding be causing it?

Grinding is on the pulp-damage list as "habitual tooth grinding (bruxism)". The Department's tip for minimising tooth wear is to "wear a custom-made dental splint if you grind your teeth at night".

How do I avoid it happening again in sport?

"Always wear a mouthguard for all sports and training where there is a risk of mouth injury, such as football, rugby, soccer, basketball, netball, water polo or hockey." And "an oral health professional can make you a professionally fitted mouthguard to give your teeth the best protection."

Related services and further reading

Why does a cracked tooth hurt?

What to do in a dental emergency

Emergency dentistry

Fillings and restorations

Dental crowns

Root canal therapy

Ways to manage grinding teeth

What causes TMJ pain and how is it treated?

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts, offer interest-free payment plans and claim from private health funds on-site with HICAPS.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online via coredental.com.au, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday 8.00am to 1.30pm (Bayside Saturday 8.30am to 1.30pm), Sunday closed
Clinics	Southbank , South Melbourne , Caroline Springs , Carrum Downs , Epping , Wyndham , Berwick , Bayside , Glenferrie

Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. This information is general in nature and is intended for people over 18. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What is the difference between a craze line and a cracked tooth?

A craze line is a minor crack in the outer enamel that usually needs no treatment. A cracked tooth can run deeper into the dentine, pulp or root and may need a filling, crown or root canal treatment. A Core Dental dentist can tell which you have.

What are common causes of a cracked or broken tooth?

Common causes include biting something hard, decay that weakens the tooth, root canal treatment that leaves less tooth structure, old amalgam restorations that stress the tooth, grinding and clenching, and a knock to the face. Our dentists look for the cause so they can help protect the tooth.

Should I bring the broken piece of tooth to Core Dental?

Yes, if you have it, bring the piece with you when you come to Core Dental. If you do not have it, tell us when you call, because the tooth can still usually be assessed and restored by your dentist.

When does a cracked tooth need root canal treatment?

Root canal treatment is likely when a crack exposes the pulp, which is the nerve tissue in the centre of the tooth. The affected pulp is removed and a crown is usually placed afterwards for protection. Your Core Dental dentist will confirm this after an examination.

How can I reduce the chance of cracking a tooth?

Regular check-ups let your Core Dental dentist spot grinding, decay and weak restorations early. A night guard may help if you grind at night, and a custom mouthguard helps in contact sport. Avoid biting very hard objects such as ice.

How much does it cost to fix a broken tooth at Core Dental?

A simple repair with a tooth-coloured composite filling has been guided at about $150 to $450, published as at September 2026, and we confirm the exact fee before treatment starts. Larger repairs cost more, and interest-free payment plans are available.

Does Core Dental see emergency patients on Saturdays?

Core Dental clinics are open Saturday mornings (to 1.30pm) as well as Monday to Friday from 8.00am to 6.00pm. We keep appointments for emergencies each day where possible, so call 13 13 16 to check current availability.

Can I see a Core Dental dentist if I am not a current patient?

Yes. We see new patients with a broken or painful tooth. Call 13 13 16 and describe what has happened, and our team will find the earliest suitable appointment across our nine clinics.