

## Probing the Conundrum of Cracked Teeth

Nothing like a toothache to ruin a good meal. Every bite you take makes you cringe—and a sip of something cold? You don't want to go there. But you do want to go to your dentist, even if the pain isn't constant. Your painful tooth may have a crack in it.

Getting a crack in your tooth is relatively easy—even just grinding your teeth puts you at risk. In fact, more than two-thirds of dental patients have at least one tooth with a crack in it. But finding that crack can be difficult. **Cracks in teeth often don't show up on an x-ray and many are too shallow to hurt, although they still pose a risk to your tooth.**

So dentists in the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network studied a large group of patients to see which teeth and which patients are most likely to develop a crack. They are also looking at how quickly a cracked tooth can change.



### Common features of teeth that get cracks

Armed with an array of sophisticated tools including high-powered magnifiers and lights that can illuminate the *inside* of a tooth, the researchers found that:

- Patients who had a painful cracked tooth were somewhat more likely than others to clench or grind their teeth, be female, and under age 65
- Having a filling doesn't affect whether a cracked tooth will be painful, but having a molar that is more worn from grinding makes it more likely that a cracked tooth will be painful
- Cracks that are stained (say, from your coffee habit) were the least likely to cause pain or sensitivity.



### What to do about a cracked tooth

The best time and way to treat a cracked tooth is still being investigated in the study. Most of the time, cracked teeth can be treated with a filling or crown; more involved treatment such as a root canal or pulling the tooth is needed much less frequently.

**If your dentist tells you that you have a cracked tooth, it's very important to see your dentist on a regular basis so they can monitor the tooth for changes.** This will give your dentist the opportunity to recommend treatment to help prevent further problems that require more extensive treatment.



Your dentist is part of the National Dental Practice-Based Research Network, a group of dental practices that treat patients and also do dental research. For more information go to [www.nationaldentalpbrn.org](http://www.nationaldentalpbrn.org).