Cracked Teeth

With more sophisticated procedures, dentists are helping people keep their teeth longer. Because people are living longer and more stressful lives, they are exposing their teeth to many more years of habits that can potentially cause cracks, such as clenching, grinding and chewing on hard objects.

Types of Cracks
There are many different types of cracked teeth. The treatment and outcome for your tooth depends on the type, location and severity of the crack.

Craze Lines: Craze lines are tiny cracks that affect only the outer enamel. These cracks are extremely common in adult teeth. Craze lines are very shallow, cause no pain, and are of no concern beyond appearances.

Fractured Cusp: When a cusp (the pointed part of the chewing surface) becomes weakened, a fracture sometimes results. The weakened cusp may break off by itself or may have to be removed by the dentist. When this happens, the pain will usually be relieved. A fractured cusp rarely damages the pulp, so root canal treatment is seldom needed. The tooth will usually be restored by your dentist with a full crown.

Cracked Tooth: This crack extends from the chewing surface of the tooth vertically towards the root. A cracked tooth is not completely separated into two distinct segments. Because of the position of the crack, damage to the pulp is common. Root canal treatment is frequently needed to treat the injured pulp. Your dentist will then restore your tooth with a full crown to bind and protect the cracked tooth. At times, the crack may extend below the gum line, requiring extraction.

Split Tooth: A split tooth is often the result of the long-term progression of a cracked tooth. The split tooth is identified by a crack with distinct segments that can be separated. A split tooth can never be saved intact. The position and extent of the crack, however, will determine whether any portion of the tooth can be saved. In rare instances, endodontic treatment and a crown or other restoration by your dentist may be used to save a portion of the tooth.

Vertical Root Fracture: Vertical root fractures are cracks that begin in the root of the tooth and extend toward the chewing surface. They often show minimal signs and symptoms and may therefore go unnoticed for some time. Vertical root fractures are often discovered when the surrounding bone and gum become infected. Treatment usually involves extraction of the tooth. However, endodontic surgery is sometimes appropriate if a portion of the tooth can be saved by removal of the fractured root.

Will My Tooth Completely Heal?
Unlike a broken bone, the fracture in a cracked tooth will never heal. In spite of treatment, some cracks may continue to progress and separate, resulting in loss of the tooth. Placement of a crown on a cracked tooth provides maximum protection but does not guarantee success in all cases.

The treatment you receive for your cracked tooth is important because it will relieve pain and reduce the likelihood that the crack will worsen. Once treated, most cracked teeth continue to function and provide years of comfortable chewing. Talk to your dentist and/or endodontist about your particular diagnosis and treatment recommendations. They will advise you on how to keep your natural teeth and achieve optimum dental health.