

Tooth Talk

“Hey Doc, this tooth keeps breaking!! What can you do for me?”

Tooth fracture is a very common occurrence. Fixing or repairing broken teeth is a normal routine in the everyday life of a general dental practice. Very often, a tooth may fracture or break over and over again until it is beyond repair and, therefore, needs to be removed!

The reasons why a tooth breaks include:

- poor bite
- habits (eg. nail biting, pencil biting etc.)
- bruxism (tooth grinding)
- diet (eg. nuts, raw/hard vegetables/fruits, etc.)
- accident
- sports
- large existing filling which weakens the structure of the tooth
- root canal treatment which also weakens the tooth
- etc.

The followings are options for fixing/repairing a broken tooth:

1) a filling with pin(s) or post(s)- A new filling can be used to fill in the part of a tooth that has cracked off. If a large portion of a tooth has broken off or a tooth has broken many times before, there may not be sufficient tooth structure remaining to hold the new filling. The dentist may have to put metal pin(s) or post(s) into the tooth to support the new filling. This option is at best a patch job as the new filling usually does not strengthen the tooth and the tooth can break again.

2) an onlay- An onlay is an indirect dental restoration consisting of either gold, porcelain, or resin that is fitted and cemented to a cavity in a tooth. The most common place for a tooth to break, especially with a back tooth, is its cusp, which is a pointed or rounded projection on the chewing surface of a tooth. An onlay will extend over the broken cusp of a tooth, thereby protecting that part of the tooth from further fracture.

3) a crown- A crown, or commonly known as a “cap”, is an indirect restoration that completely covers over the tooth. It is cemented onto the tooth. It is used to improve the strength of a tooth and prevent the tooth from further fracture. Just like a hard hat that a construction worker wears to prevent skull fracture, a crown protects the tooth from enamel and root fracture. It can be made of metal-colour or tooth-colour material.

Next time when you have a broken tooth, be sure you discuss with your dentist which option will be the best to protect that tooth. Do not leave that tooth alone as it may break more or become decayed and, soon, you will lose that tooth!!

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