

A Chipped Tooth...

Contrary to a life's worth of classmate teasing, I was not named Chip because of a chipped tooth I suffered in fourth grade. Nor was I a "Chip" off the old block. Chocolate "Chip" and potato "Chip" were also often thrown about, but I was not named after either of those. My personal favorite (now looking back), cow "Chip," even got me into a few elementary school playground tussles. Alas, I've always just been Chip, short for my real name Charles.

Speaking of chips, one of the most common dental injuries we see is the classic chipped tooth. For today's discussion, let's call a chipped tooth one with a sharp edge where the damage is limited to the outer enamel tooth structure. Let us also throw out any symptoms other than looking bad or annoying the tongue. In other words, no trauma.

So what are the options to fix a chipped tooth? Let's list from least invasive on.

The most conservative treatment for fractured enamel is to do nothing. At the very least, we'll smooth it off with sandpaper like discs and monitor it from then on. This is often fine in the back, but not really an option for most if a front tooth is damaged and looks funny.

The next most conservative treatment is a bonded tooth colored filling. In certain instances, these can work great. In areas of heavy use or function though, these will often be broken off in a short time. This is because it is very difficult to bond a filling onto a small piece of tooth...just not enough to glue to.

If a filling won't work, we have to look at a restoration that bonds to more healthy tooth structure. That would be a ceramic veneer or a ceramic onlay. A veneer can be thought of as a porcelain facing that is glued on to the front of a tooth. An onlay is basically a veneer on the chewing surface of a back tooth, kind of like a jigsaw puzzle piece. Both of these restorations are stronger and should last longer than a tooth colored filling.

Finally, if a tooth has a very large chip and/or if it has some existing cracks or old fillings, a full coverage crown might be the best option. A cap or a crown is a routine procedure where a tooth is reshaped all around so that a new lab made tooth can be made to cover the remaining healthy tooth structure. Today's crowns can be made to look just like natural teeth.

Hopefully, you or someone you love will never try to eat a basketball court with your/their front teeth like I did. If so, you now know a few options for getting them fixed.

Until next week, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish at www.ParrishDental.com.