

## Dental Drama: Why your Toothache could be more than just a Tooth Temper Tantrum

**SEATTLE – Sept. 1, 2024** – Toothaches are a real pain in the mouth. One moment you are sitting on the couch watching your favorite TV show and the next your mouth is throbbing with sharp pains emanating from your jaw area.

More than 40% of Americans suffer from toothaches, which makes it one of the most common oral health maladies. Just because they are common, though, doesn't mean you should ignore that pain in your mouth as they are often the precursor to something much worse. It could be your body signaling tooth decay or a cracked tooth or a loose or broken filling.

Toothaches occur when dental pulp, which is the innermost layer of teeth and is filled with sensitive nerves and blood vessels, becomes inflamed. This inflammation can then cause problems resulting in the pain you feel in your mouth, and while it can be easy to just assume the pain will go away there are more severe issues which can cause similar pain that should be checked by your dentist. These include periodontal abscesses, ulcers on the gums, sore or swollen gums around a tooth that is breaking through (wisdom teeth, for example) or sinusitis, which can cause pain in the upper jaw.

“Visiting your dentist when you have a toothache ensures you get the appropriate care to address the problem, can relieve pain and maintains your oral health,” said Kyle Dosch, DDS, Delta Dental of Washington’s dental director and member dentist. “Addressing problems related to toothaches can help avoid more extensive and costly treatments down the line.”

**Pain management:** Over the counter painkillers like paracetamol (Tylenol) and ibuprofen may reduce the pain and discomfort you are experiencing while you wait to see your dentist. If over the counter medicine is not your first choice, there are some home remedies you can use for less severe symptoms.

**Cold compress:** Can provide relief by numbing the pain and reducing swelling and inflammation. This remedy works by constricting the blood vessels, which slows the flow of blood to the painful area. To use a cold compress, simply hold an ice pack or bag of frozen vegetables on the outside of the cheek for a few minutes at a time.

**Saltwater gargle:** A saltwater rinse for a toothache can help clear food and debris from the infected area and provide temporary relief by rinsing away bacteria. Swish a small amount of saltwater in your mouth for 30 seconds and repeat a few times as necessary.

**Peppermint tea bags:** Peppermint contains menthol, an ingredient with known numbing and antibacterial properties, which might help fight off a potential infection. To use, dampen a peppermint tea bag and place it into the freezer for a few minutes then apply the cooled tea bag onto the affected area for 20 minutes.

**Hydrogen peroxide rinse:** Like saltwater, hydrogen peroxide acts as a cleansing aid, but doesn't just remove bacteria, it attacks it. Mix equal parts hydrogen peroxide and water and swish it in your mouth. It is important to remember, though, not to swallow the peroxide or use this remedy with children.

**Garlic:** It's not just a delicious additive for your meals, it also has antibacterial and antimicrobial properties, which are the result of the compound allicin which is produced when cloves are chewed, crushed or sliced. To use for a toothache, first mash a garlic clove with a pinch of salt and apply to the affected area. Raw garlic can cause bad breath, body odor, bloating and heartburn.

It is important to remember that these remedies are all short-term fixes and if your pain persists for more than 48 hours, you should schedule an appointment with a dentist to find out what is going on.

Your dental health professional will likely take an x-ray of your mouth and then determine the next steps. Those could include receiving a filling, having a filling fixed, receiving a root canal or even having your tooth removed.

The best prevention for toothaches and the underlying causes are limiting your intake of sugary foods and drinks, brushing your teeth twice a day for two minutes, flossing once a day, not smoking and having regular checkups with your dentist.

For more information about oral health, visit Delta Dental of Washington's [blog](#).

### **About Delta Dental of Washington**

Founded 70 years ago by Seattle area dentists who set out to revolutionize oral health care, an innovative program was developed to provide longshoremen's children access to dental care – and the concept of dental benefits was born. Today [Delta Dental of Washington](#), a not-for-profit, is the state's leading dental benefits provider covering nearly 4 million people statewide and beyond.

Through corporate philanthropy, oral health advocacy, and funding the [Arcora Foundation](#), Delta Dental of Washington plays a vital role in making dental care more equitable and accessible, increasing dental health education with an emphasis on youth, and expanding diversity at all levels within the dental profession. These collective efforts aim to improve oral health care in Washington so all people can enjoy good oral and overall health with no one left behind. Delta Dental of Washington is part of the Delta Dental Plans Association, consisting of 39 independent, affiliated member companies. For more information, visit: [www.deltadentalwa.com](http://www.deltadentalwa.com).