



# ask the DENTIST

**Got a question for a dentist?**

If you have a question you would like answered by a Ministry of Health-approved dentist, send it to us at enquiries.anjar@gmail.com. This issue, your questions are answered by **Dato' Dr. How Kim Chuan** and **Dr. Stephanie Chong** of Imperial Dental Specialist Centre.



## TONGUE TWISTER

I am a 21-year-old student living in KL. I have been thinking about getting a tongue piercing but have heard that it may be bad for my health. According to information I've read online, complications can include pain, swelling and possible cracked teeth. I would like to know if this is true and whether you believe tongue piercings are actually safe. While I would really love to have my tongue pierced, my health is my number one priority.  
GT, Kepong



*Tongue piercing is pretty common nowadays and should be safe as long as the person doing the procedure is experienced, and uses sterilized or single use instruments.*

*Pain and swelling are common complications in most invasive procedures like these, but the tongue should*

*heal within a couple of days, similar to ear piercing. Keeping proper hygiene should be your utmost concern when it comes to a tongue piercing. It should be removed daily and cleaned to prevent any plaque accumulation which leads to infection.*

*Cracked teeth on the other hand vary between individuals. The tongue piercing in the mouth, which is usually metal, could accidentally 'knock' on your lower molars which would be very traumatic. Extra care is necessary when you are still new with the tongue piercing. Speech difficulty at the beginning is to be expected, as our tongue is vital for speech and proper pronunciation.*

## CRACKED!

I suffered a terrible toothache because of a cracked tooth. Although the tooth has already been extracted, I remember experiencing a pain so excruciating that I couldn't sleep or eat until the tooth was extracted. I even tried taking four Panadol to ease the pain, but nothing helped. In your opinion, how can I better manage toothaches in the future and what can I do if dental emergencies happen in the middle of the night?  
TSM, Sabah



*Cracked teeth are one of the most difficult conditions to diagnose, as they do not appear on radiographs. More than often the crack is microscopic. Once we are able to detect it with the naked eye it will be too late, and the tooth will need to be extracted.*

*Cracked teeth are usually caused by tooth grinding or clenching; excessive masticatory/biting forces; extensive restoration/fillings or a root canal-treated tooth which has not be crowned, especially molars. Usually it occurs when biting on a certain angle with increased biting force on the tooth concerned. This is followed by a sharp pain.*

*Individuals with cracked tooth syndrome normally have multiple teeth that have the same condition, which is very worrying. Hence patients are usually advised to wear a night guard to help cushion the effect of grinding and clenching.*

*Toothaches which are associated with tooth cracks are very severe and very acute. Regular dental check-ups every six months would help in diagnosing these conditions early. Preventive measures can then be taken. Patients who already have a history of cracked teeth should inform their regular dentist so that they can keep a look out for other teeth in the mouth in the similar state.*

*In Malaysia, 24-hour dental clinics are not available yet, however most hospitals have a dental surgeon on standby/on call, so you can visit any hospital nearest to your home for emergency treatment if needed.*

## WHITE OUT

I am a 36-year-old man with really stained teeth. I would very much like to undergo a teeth whitening treatment but am unsure of how long results will last since I am a smoker and coffee drinker. What is your advice for patients such as I, and would you still recommend teeth whitening if I'm not willing to stop my nicotine or caffeine intake?  
Din, Bangsar



*Teeth staining is often misunderstood as a person having yellowish teeth. Most of the time coffee and nicotine stains can be easily removed by a simple scaling and polishing, easier known as teeth cleaning. I would advise a six-monthly check-up and cleaning to remove tartar and stains which appears as brownish patches on your teeth.*

*Teeth whitening is recommended for patients who have a yellow base colour of teeth. Our teeth have different shades of white, with a yellow tinge which is pretty similar to our skin colour. Teeth whitening actually 'bleaches' your teeth to a whiter shade. Teeth whitening is effective; however the effects would not last as long with a coffee drinker and smoker. In these cases the efficiency is reduced to half.*

*Although coffee and nicotine play a part in turning teeth yellow, I would advise you to visit your dentist and let her diagnose your condition.*