



What You Need to Know About Sensitive Teeth

If the pleasure of eating a delicious bowl of ice cream or sipping a soothing cup of tea is overshadowed by dental pain that makes you wince, it's time to see your dentist. Tooth sensitivity is a common problem that once properly diagnosed can be relieved with treatment.

The first step in dealing with tooth sensitivity is to have your dentist determine what is causing your discomfort. A quick stinging pain in a tooth can be a result of any number of dental problems including cavities, chipped or fractured teeth, worn fillings, gum recession, worn tooth enamel, an exposed tooth root, or the temporary after effects of a recent dental procedure.

Some tooth sensitivity is merely the result of the outermost protective layer of the crown of the tooth (the enamel) wearing away or the gums receding. When this happens, the dentin, an inner and more vulnerable portion of your tooth, becomes exposed. Now, everything that enters your mouth comes into direct contact with your tooth's dentin. Since the dentin communicates with the nerve endings inside of your tooth, eating or drinking anything like hot, cold, or acidic food and beverages can cause you to feel a sharp jolt of pain. This condition is known as dentin hypersensitivity.

It is estimated that close to 40 million adults in the United States suffer from some degree of dentin hypersensitivity. Those most commonly affected by it are in the 20 to 50 years old age group.

For some people the discomfort of sensitive teeth is so significant that they alter their daily routines doing such things as avoiding ice-cold foods and drinks completely, using a straw each time they have a beverage, and keeping their lips together when taking a breath in cold weather.

There are several behaviors and situations that can put you at risk for developing this condition.

The most common cited causes of exposed and sensitive dentin are gingival recession, the wearing away of healthy tooth structure due to habits such as overaggressive tooth brushing or tooth grinding, chemical erosion of teeth from a diet high that is high in acids foods



or beverages, as well as the overuse of teeth whitening agents. In addition health problems such as dry mouth, acid reflux and eating disorders can lead to irritated dentin and tooth sensitivity.



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Once your dentist determines that you are suffering from dentin hypersensitivity an appropriate treatment plan to reduce your discomfort will be recommended. There are a variety of regimens your dentist can offer you. These include both in-office services and products that can be applied at home. First and foremost your dentist will work with you to identify and address any risk factors. You may need to make some lifestyle changes to modify your diet as well as adopt methods to curb harmful dental habits. Your dentist will emphasize and instruct you in as to how to incorporate the best oral healthcare practices into your daily routine.

Good oral hygiene and regular dental care are essential for preventing gum recession and the development of dentin hypersensitivity. Your dentist will show you the proper way to brush and floss your teeth so that you do not continue to abrade away healthy tooth structure. It may also be suggested that you begin using a special desensitizing toothpaste a couple of times a day. Desensitizing toothpaste usually takes several applications or a couple of weeks to take effect and to relieve your discomfort.

If desensitizing toothpaste does not ease your symptoms, there are other therapeutic regimens available. Your dentist can either apply a fluoride gel to strengthen your tooth enamel and reduce the

transmission of sensations in the involved teeth or utilize another topically applied desensitizing product.

Some cases of dentin hypersensitivity may require more complex dental procedures. This can involve the placement of a filling or another dental restoration to seal off sensitive dentin or a surgical gum graft to cover exposed tooth roots. Occasionally, a root canal procedure is required to deal with persistent and severe dentin hypersensitivity.

There is no shortage of solutions to address this common and uncomfortable issue. In fact many of the dental treatments available today provide relief for your sensitive teeth while also improving the appearance of your smile. A visit to the dentist is the best way to achieve a healthier, more beautiful, and pain-free smile.

