



## **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.