



Your sensitive teeth

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Just one sip of hot coffee, a taste of delicious ice cream, or maybe just breathing in the cool morning air... and PAIN! You have sensitive teeth, do you?

Sensitive teeth are quite common so you are no doubt in good company. Tooth pain can stem from many causes including tooth decay, a crack, worn enamel or fillings, receding gums and gum disease. Fortunately, there are things you can do to reduce the pain, or to prevent it altogether.

Other reasons for sensitive teeth include brushing too hard, or with too-hard bristles which can wear down the tooth and injure gums. Tooth whitening or baking soda (abrasive) can also damage teeth. Plaque, a build-up of bacteria that generates acids, can eat away protective layers. Even aging can lead to sensitivity as teeth do wear over time. Grinding your teeth or clenching your jaw are both habits that damage teeth.

Whatever the source, sensitivity in a tooth occurs when its nerve is over-stimulated. And this mostly happens because of wear or damage to the tooth.

Your teeth have several layers coming between that 'deadly' cold air or hot drink and the root. Enamel is the outer shell that does the biting and chewing. Wear or cracks in the enamel can lead to decay and opening up pathways into the tooth itself.

A deeper layer of the tooth, called cementum, protects the dentin underneath, and the pulp of the

tooth beneath. Dentin is made up of microscopic tubes (called tubules) that lead into the pulp. As cementum is worn away, dentin is exposed. Dentin simply funnels stimulation deep into the tooth, and the nerve. (Exactly: Ouch!)

Stimuli that can cause pain include heat, cold, acidic or sticky foods, each the bane of someone with sensitive teeth. But what to do?

The first and most simple way to prevent teeth becoming too sensitive is to brush and floss properly, with a soft-bristled brush, and to do it regularly. Add in regular professional cleaning and if necessary, fluoride treatment. These steps will prevent damage and cavities and give your teeth their best protection. That might not be enough, or perhaps it is too late already.

Using a desensitizing toothpaste can help. It contains compounds that help block sensation travelling

from the tooth surface to the nerve. It usually requires several applications before sensitivity is reduced, but well-worth the effort.

If desensitizing toothpaste does not reduce the pain, a treatment by

your dentist may be the next step. Assuming there is no cavity, damage or disease causing the pain, he or she will apply a fluoride gel or desensitizing agents to the sensitive areas.

Pain symptoms in your teeth may be caused by a number of things. Because the pain you feel is similar for most of them, what appears to be excessive sensitivity could be a cavity, infection or gum disease, in which case, best see your dentist.

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