



SENSITIVE TEETH – ARE YOU A VICTIM?

Why are my teeth sensitive?

Exposed dentin is the likely reason for your sensitive teeth. The dentin is the core part in the center of your tooth. Dentin is covered by the protective layer of enamel that is the outside of your tooth. When this enamel wears away or decays, the dentin becomes exposed and receptive to sensations, including pain. Dentin exposure and sensitivity also occur when roots are exposed due to gum recession.

When does tooth sensitivity usually occur?

You may experience tooth sensitivity after eating cold or hot foods, drinking cold or hot liquids, or breathing cold air.

What causes my teeth to be so sensitive?

Causes of tooth sensitivity include brushing too hard, which wears away enamel, and gum disease. Other causes include cracked or chipped teeth and grinding or clenching your teeth. Medical conditions like bulimia also may lead to exposed dentin. Your diet may play a role as well. Consumption of acidic foods and drinks, such as citrus fruits (e.g. lemons) and carbonated beverages (e.g. ginger ale, which has the lowest pH of any drink commonly available), can chemically dissolve enamel over time, resulting in exposed dentin. Brushing directly after ingestion of these substances also must be avoided because it causes direct damage to enamel.

Some toothpaste brands contain abrasive ingredients that may wear away enamel. Ingredients found in some whitening toothpastes and bleaching treatments may increase tooth sensitivity as well.

How do I know when it's time to see a dentist?

If your teeth are highly sensitive for more than three or four days and they react to hot and cold temperatures, it's best to get an evaluation from your dentist.

How does a dentist determine dentin sensitivity?

A dentist can gauge the severity of your sensitive teeth by using an air test. The dentist sprays air across each area of your teeth to pinpoint the exact location of sensitivity. Your dentist will examine your teeth, look for causes of sensitivity, and make treatment recommendations. If sensitivity is associated with clenching and/or grinding, your dentist may recommend bite evening or a bite guard.

Dentists have a variety of treatments for dentin hypersensitivity. Products for home use include desensitizing fluorides and mouth rinses. In-office procedures include application of desensitizing agents or protective sealants.

What can I do to improve tooth sensitivity?

Practice good control of mouth acids and plaque to maintain healthy teeth and gums. Use a soft-bristled toothbrush and avoid brushing your teeth too hard. Watch out for the foods that you eat and try to avoid acidic foods and drinks. In addition be alert for muscle soreness or tightness that might be a symptom of an uneven bite or clenching and grinding.

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