

Your Teeth Have Feelings Too

Does the thought of having a glass of ice-cold water send shivers down your spine? Have you ever taken a deep breath and grimaced as you experience a sharp shooting pain through your teeth? If you have, then you likely have tooth sensitivity. This is real discomfort and it will often lead to an altered quality of life. It is estimated that roughly 45 million Americans are afflicted with some form of tooth sensitivity. If you happen to be one of these people, there is no need to suffer any longer as many treatments are available to reduce the symptoms.

SENSITIVITY CAN BE DEFINED as pain or discomfort in the tooth caused by a stimulus. It may be hot or cold liquids, sweets, acidic foods, air, or even tooth brushing that causes the quick sharp sensation. The first step in the treatment is to consult with your dentist.

There are several conditions that can lead to tooth sensitivity. Dental decay is one of them and it is a process where plaque and sugar together cause the loss of calcification of the tooth. As the decay progresses, the nerve of the tooth becomes irritated and reacts when exposed to any of the previously mentioned stimuli. Cracked teeth are another condition that can lead to tooth sensitivity. Quite often it is not known whether a tooth is cracked until your dentist carefully examines the tooth. Your dentist can fix both dental decay and cracked teeth with a dental restoration.

The remaining and most frequent causes of tooth sensitivity are a result of exposed dentin to the mouth. This is a very specific type of tooth sensitivity termed dentin hypersensitivity. A very hard shell of enamel normally covers the dentin of your tooth, which extends below the gum line. The most common cause of dentin exposure is from toothbrush-toothpaste abrasion leading

to gingival recession. It is thought that the use of a medium to hard bristled toothbrush, very abrasive toothpastes, or traumatic brushing techniques can cause the gum line to be abraded away, leading to recession. The exposed root of your tooth, which does not have the protective enamel covering, can be extremely sensitive. It is estimated that up to 80 percent of people have some degree of gum recession by the time they are 65. Other causes of dentin exposure can be enamel wear from grinding, or the enamel can dissolve in the presence of an acidic environment, called erosion. Common causes of erosion are diets high in citrus foods and soda, bulimia, or GERD (reflux).

Using a soft bristled brush, a low abrasive toothpaste, and correct brushing technique can prevent gingival recession. Most sensitive formulated toothpastes recognized by the ADA are good choices for toothpaste. A diet that is not acidic also helps prevent tooth sensitivity. Ignoring your sensitive teeth can lead to other oral health problems, especially if the pain causes you to brush poorly, making you vulnerable to tooth decay and gum disease.

The treatment for dentin hypersensitivity often begins conservatively with a sensitive formulated



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toothpaste or a prescription fluoride rinse. There are in-office products that can be painted on the exposed dentin, which have been found to lessen the sensitivity. If the sensitivity is severe or there is no relief from conservative methods, your dentist may place a plastic filling over the root to protect it. Lastly, a great option is to have your periodontist repair the gingival recession with a gingival graft that will cover the roots and bring relief.

With the sweltering summer just around the corner, you don't have to pass on the iced tea. Sensitive teeth are a fairly widespread phenomenon but it is not something you have to live with. Tell your dentist about your sensitivity so you can take advantage of the many methods available to bring relief. 