

Why are my teeth sensitive?

Does the thought of eating ice cream make you wince instead of salivate? Do you find yourself avoiding certain foods, drinking warmer beverages, or living day-to-day with sensitive teeth? Tooth sensitivity is one of the most common complaints among dental patients. At least 40 million adults in the United States suffer at some time in their lives from sensitive teeth. Tooth sensitivity can affect or change your eating, drinking and breathing habits. Taking a sip of cold water, for example, can be a painful experience for people with sensitive teeth. There is no reason for people to suffer with teeth sensitivity. The first step is identifying the cause (there are several possibilities) and then finding the proper solution (your dentist can help you!).

REASONS FOR TEETH SENSITIVITY:

Teeth Grinding:

Grinding your teeth, most commonly while sleeping, wears down the enamel (even though it is the hardest substance in your body) and exposes the inner layer of your tooth which houses hollow tubes that lead to your nerves. Clenching and grinding is very common, and in reality, the majority of people clench or grind to some degree. In fact, I was first told I was a grinder in dental school, but just like most people, I didn't want to believe I had a problem. I had many symptoms of a grinder (morning headaches and jaw tension, temperature sensitivity throughout the mouth, and receding gums), however, I attributed them to other things in life like stress or just being born with "sensitive teeth." Occlusal guards are hard acrylic appliances custom made by your dentist, that are worn at night protect your teeth from any further damage. After about two

weeks of wearing this appliance, something did NOT look forward to, I finally realized what true comfort was. My teeth sensitivity went com-



Dentally Speaking
by
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pletely away, I felt no tension in my jaw or head in the morning and I slept better than ever!

Just make sure to have your dentist properly fit you for your night guard. Although, store bought guards may be attractive because of the price, these can actually do more harm to you than good. Over-the-counter guards can make you grind more because they are soft and your brain registers that as food. This increased clenching can give you severe muscle spasms resulting in increased jaw pain and headaches, and sometimes leading to TMJ problems.

Gum Recession:

Like I mentioned above, receding gums can be the result of an untreated grinding or clenching problem. The mechanical stresses that are placed on the teeth put so much force at the bone level of the roots that the gums pull away. In addition, notches on the roots at the gumline, called "abfractations," are sometimes present which are very sensitive to temperature and brushing for many people. Another cause of gum recession is poor oral hygiene or periodontal (gum) disease. When infection is present around the teeth and gums often times the root surfaces of the teeth become exposed. Brushing and flossing everyday is recommended to remove plaque from your teeth. Plaque that is not removed starts to wear away the enamel from your teeth exposing the sensitive under layer and leads to gum disease.

Choice of Toothpaste:

Some toothpastes contain abrasive ingredients that may be too harsh for people who have sensitive teeth. Ingredi-

ents found in some whitening toothpastes that lighten and/or remove certain stains from enamel and sodium pyrophosphate, the key ingredient in tartar-control toothpaste, may increase tooth sensitivity. Tooth sensitivity can be reduced by using desensitizing toothpaste like Sensodyne. Did you know you can get a prescription for tooth paste? Ask your dentist and he can easily write you a note for the pharmacy. The popular and well-known brand name Colgate makes a terrific prescription-only tooth paste called Prevident 5000 Plus.

HOW DO I KNOW WHEN IT'S TIME TO SEE A DENTIST?

If a tooth is highly sensitive for more than three or four days and reacts to hot and cold temperatures, it's best to get a diagnostic evaluation from your dentist to determine the extent of the problem. Before taking the situation into your own hands, an accurate diagnosis of tooth sensitivity is essential for effective treatment to eliminate pain. Because pain symptoms can be similar, some people might think that a tooth is sensitive, when instead, they actually have a cavity or abscess that's not yet visible.

People are not just born with sensitive teeth. There are many underlying causes to why teeth are sensitive and you could be making things worse by not addressing this issue now. Don't continue to suffer with it, especially when there are very easy and effective solutions for this common problem.

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If you are ashamed to stand by your colors, you had better seek another flag.

~Author Unknown