



SENSITIVE TEETH

Sensitive teeth are those that are painful whenever you eat or drink extreme hot or cold foods and beverages, such as ice cream or hot coffee.

The sensitivity occurs because protective layers have worn away from your teeth, usually on the chewing surfaces or at the gum line. Sensitive teeth can be caused by:

- Tooth decay (cavities)
- Fractured teeth
- Worn fillings
- Gum disease
- Worn tooth enamel
- Exposed tooth root

Healthy teeth have a layer of enamel that protects the crowns, the part above the gum line. Enamel seals the tooth's chewing surface, just like a hard hat protects its wearer from injury. The next layer, dentin, covers sensitive nerves. When the tooth's protective layers wear away or gums recede, the dentin is exposed, resulting in sensitive teeth.¹

Treatment for sensitive teeth

Your dentist may suggest any of these options to treat sensitive teeth:

- Desensitizing toothpaste. Desensitizing toothpaste contains potassium and other ingredients that help prevent the nerves in the teeth from reacting. With regular use, individuals with sensitive teeth often notice an improvement. Use desensitizing toothpaste with the American Dental Association Seal of Approval.
- Fluoride gel. Fluoride gel is applied by the dentist to strengthen tooth enamel so hypersensitive nerves do not overact.
- A crown, inlay, or bonding. These procedures can correct a flaw or decay that may be causing the sensitivity.
- Surgical gum graft. If the tooth root has lost gum tissue, a surgical gum graft can protect the root and reduce sensitivity.
- Root canal. This dental operation is recommended when teeth cause severe and persistent pain and cannot be treated by other means.

24/7 Emergency Contact Number: 1-888-295-5156

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Preventing sensitivity

Prevent sensitive teeth with proper oral hygiene: twice daily toothbrushing, flossing once daily, and visiting your dentist for cleanings every six months and whenever you have any mouth or tooth pain or notice something is not normal. If you have any questions about tooth sensitivity, talk to your dentist.²

For more information

For more information, contact the Division of Public Health, Bureau of Oral Health and Dental Services, at 302-622-4540 and www.dhss.delaware.gov/dhss/dph/hsm/ohphome.html.

Resources

1. American Dental Association. 2020. *Tooth*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/t/tooth>
2. American Dental Association. 2020. *Sensitive Teeth*. In Mouth Healthy. Retrieved July 17, 2020 from <https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/s/sensitive-teeth>