

Addressing Sensitivity

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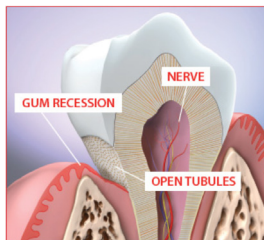
Does eating ice cream 'send you through the roof'? Do you use a straw with certain drinks to keep the liquid from contacting your teeth?

Sensitivity is a common symptom of teeth, and can be caused by several things:

- Cavities
- Exposed tooth roots
- Gum Disease
- Fractured teeth
- Worn tooth structure
- Acid erosion and/or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Children's front teeth - children normally have sensitivity to cold on their teeth because of their relatively large pulps.

First of all, visiting your dentist is very important when it comes to sensitivity. On occasion, sensitivity is a symptom of a larger cavity in a tooth. Delaying diagnosis and treatment can cause more time and money spent at the dentist.

However, sensitivity does not always mean a tooth is decaying or the health of the tooth is in immediate jeopardy. In fact, most of the examples above involve exposure of healthy tooth structure. Our outer layer of tooth, the enamel, is a hard, protective layer above the gum line that covers and protects our teeth from sensitivity to temperature and touch. The second layer of tooth, the dentin, has microscopic tubules that aid in sending sensory information to the pulp. Normally, these tubules are covered by the enamel, but when the enamel is lost by either wear, fracture, or acid erosion, these tubules become exposed. The result is a more sensitive tooth.



A similar explanation can be applied to when recession of the gums is present on one or more teeth. In this case, the gums move down on the tooth, exposing the root surface. The root surface has a thin layer called the cementum, which is not as protective or as robust as the enamel. When the cementum is lost, the dentin tubules become exposed and sensitivity increases.

Fortunately, sensitive teeth can be treated. The first line of defense for low-grade sensitivity from minor recession is desensitizing toothpaste. These toothpastes don't help immediately, but require several applications to help block transmission of sensory information in the dentin tubules. Fluoride applications have also been proven to aid with hypersensitivity. In addition, there are other products your dentist can apply to the exposed root surfaces that provide faster and more long lasting relief. For larger recession areas, the above remedies can help, but your dentist may want to protect the root surface by grafting gum tissue to the area, which protects and reduces sensitivity.

In the case of missing enamel, tooth-colored fillings or crowns may be required to cover the exposed dentin. If sensitivity is severe and other measures have been tried, a root canal may be recommended by your dentist. Thankfully, typical sensitivity that is not caused by a cavity does not usually result in a root canal.

You shouldn't have to live with constant sensitivity. Visit your dentist and have your concerns addressed.

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