



Shedding Light on Tooth Sensitivity

Most people experience it at some time in their life – a zing when eating or drinking something hot, cold, acidic, or sweet. Tooth sensitivity is not a pleasant experience, whether experiencing it in one tooth or in several, and should be addressed when visiting your dentist. Tooth sensitivity can be treated!

Healthy teeth are naturally built to protect us from sensitivity. The crown of each tooth – the part of the tooth showing above the gum line – is covered with a layer of hard enamel. Similarly, the roots of each tooth, located below the gum line, are covered with cementum. These hard tissues are designed to protect the dentin, a softer tissue found within the tooth, from exposure. As a soft tissue, dentin is not as solid as enamel or cementum, with tiny canals (tubules) located throughout the tissue, leading to the nerves and blood vessels deep inside the tooth.

Whenever the protective layers of enamel and/or cementum are compromised (lost), leaving the dentin exposed, you are likely to experience a level of hypersensitivity. Some people are born without any enamel on their teeth and some with weak enamel, leaving these folks susceptible to tooth sensitivity. Other possible causes of tooth sensitivity include:

- Worn tooth enamel or cementum
- Cavities
- Tooth fractures
- Broken or worn fillings
- Gum disease
- Exposed tooth roots

The good news about tooth sensitivity is that it can be treated once your dentist determines the cause.

Your dentist may recommend:

- Use of a soft toothbrush
- Desensitizing toothpaste – specially formulated to block sensations on the tooth surface from reaching the nerve, though it does require several uses before the reduction in sensitivity is noticeable.
- Fluoride treatment – completed in-office, this treatment strengthens enamel in order to better protect the dentin and reduce sensations from reaching the tooth nerve.
- Fillings – sensitivity caused by decay/cavities can be treated by removing the decay from the tooth and reinforcing the tooth with a filling.
- A Crown, Inlay, or Bonding – used to treat missing, flawed, or decayed enamel that would cause sensitivity.
- Surgical graft – sensitivity stemming from gum recession due to gum disease can be treated by rebuilding the gum tissue surrounding the root.
- Root canal – used as a last resort for consistently severe sensitivity, your dentist may recommend this procedure if your sensitivity cannot be treated by any other means.

Practicing proper oral hygiene and visiting your dentist regularly are your best defense from tooth sensitivity. If you are experiencing tooth sensitivity, no matter how minor, make sure to address it with your dentist – addressing it sooner, rather than later, could prevent more pain down the road!