

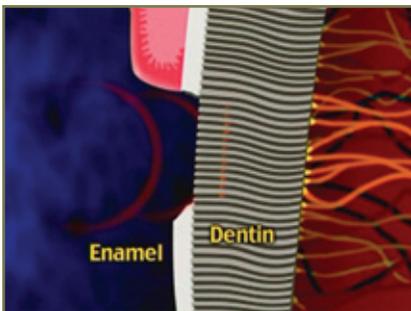
Sensitive Teeth

One of the most common problems that bring people to our office is sensitive teeth. If your teeth hurt with exposure to cold air, hot or cold food and beverages, or sweets, you may have sensitive teeth.

What causes sensitive teeth?

Often, teeth are sensitive because the dentin layer of the tooth has become exposed. The dentin is the middle layer of the tooth. Above the gums, the dentin layer is normally covered by an outer layer, called the enamel, and, on the roots, cementum.

Dentin contains millions of tiny tubes that extend from the nerves at the center of the tooth to the outer layer. When the dentin is exposed, these tubes are left open. Any stimulation at the surface of the dentin is transmitted through the tubes to the nerves, causing pain.



Dentin layer exposed



Abfraction

One way the dentin can become exposed is when enamel breaks away from the tooth through abfraction. This occurs when one tooth hits sooner than the rest, causing the teeth to flex. Over time, this continual flexing causes the enamel to separate from the dentin layer.

Another way the dentin can become exposed is when the enamel is worn away. Brushing too hard, using a medium- or hard-bristled toothbrush, using an abrasive "tartar-control" or "whitening" toothpaste, grinding or clenching your teeth, can all expose the dentin. Some dental procedures may temporarily expose the dentin, leading to short-term sensitivity.

Treating sensitive teeth

Tooth sensitivity may seem like just an annoyance, but left untreated, the pain can have far-reaching effects. Sometimes it stops people from properly brushing and flossing their teeth. This can lead to more sensitivity, decay, infection, and even tooth and bone loss.

To determine the cause of your tooth pain, we'll thoroughly examine your teeth, and then perform the most appropriate treatment for the situation. If the problem is abfraction, we may adjust your bite, restore the damage by bonding a filling in place, or crown the tooth. If the problem is a worn-away outer layer, we may present a plan for improved brushing techniques, treat the area with fluoride, or apply a protective coating or bonding agent.

Homecare for sensitive teeth

Proper homecare is essential. Depending on your situation, we may recommend that you:

- Avoid high-acid and high-sugar foods, like tea, citrus, soda pop, and sports drinks
- Use a desensitizing toothpaste or mouthwash
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush or electric toothbrush
- Wear a nightguard if you clench or grind your teeth