

# Sensitive Teeth

Dental sensitivity occurs when the dentin (middle layer) of a tooth is exposed. Normally, the dentin is covered by enamel above the gumline and by cementum below the gumline. Dentin is made up of tiny openings called tubules. Inside each tubule lies a nerve branch that comes from the tooth's pulp (the nerve center of the tooth). When the dentin is exposed, cold or hot temperature or pressure can affect these nerve branches. This causes sensitivity.



## Some causes of dentin exposure include:

- Brushing your teeth too hard. This wears away the enamel layer.
- Poor oral hygiene. This may allow tartar to build up at the gumline.
- Long-term tooth wear
- Untreated cavities
- An old filling with a crack or leak
- This removes stains from coffee, tea, smoking etc; and makes it more difficult for plaque to stick to your teeth.
- Gum surgery that exposes a tooth's roots
- Tooth whitening in people who have tooth roots that already are exposed

- Frequently eating acidic foods or drinking acidic beverages

## Home care measures to control sensitive teeth :

- Desensitizing toothpaste. There are several brands of toothpaste for sensitive teeth available. Your dentist may recommend one or you may have to try different brands until you find the product that works for you. Be sure to use fluoridated toothpaste for sensitive teeth, not tartar-control toothpaste. Try spreading a thin layer of the desensitizing toothpaste on the exposed tooth roots before bed.
- Use a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Avoid highly acidic foods.
- Use a fluoridated mouthwash daily.
- Avoid teeth grinding. Consider getting a mouth guard.

## Some dental procedures to treat sensitive teeth

- Bonding, crowns or inlays. These may fix a tooth flaw or decay that is causing sensitivity.
- Fluoride gel or varnish.
- Surgical gum graft. This will protect the root and reduce sensitivity if the gum tissue has eroded from the root.
- Root canal treatment. This is a last-resort for severe tooth sensitivity that has not been helped by other methods.