

PREVENTING TOOTH SENSITIVITY

Dentine sensitivity is a common problem, which may affect you during eating, drinking, brushing and sometimes even breathing. The symptoms range from mild discomfort to short sharp pains, which **normally get better** when the particular cause (stimulus) is removed.

The main causes are cold drinks, cold foods, cold air or acid foodstuffs (e.g. citrus fruits). Temporary sensitivity may also occur during tooth bleaching and after the treatment of gum disease.

What causes the pain of sensitive teeth?

A tooth is largely made up of dentine, which is a living tissue and consists of tiny tubules filled with fluid. The tiny tubules in 'sensitive' dentine are wider and more numerous than tiny tubules in 'non-sensitive' dentine.

Dentine is usually covered by enamel (on the crown) or by cementum (on the root). Symptoms are felt when a stimulus applied to exposed dentine increases the fluid flow in the tubules and excites the nerve endings in the pulp (nerve) of the tooth.

How can dentine sensitivity be managed?

Prevent acid erosion

- Try to limit acidic foods and drinks to mealtimes only:
 - Sources include: citrus fruit, green apples, vinegar, pickles, health, sports and fizzy drinks, cider, dry wine, also some vitamin pills and medicines.
- Acid may come from the stomach: e.g. vomiting, chronic indigestion, 'heartburn', hiatus hernia:
 - Suck an antacid or chew sugar free gum to neutralise the acid.
 - Seek further advice if there is a medical cause for vomiting or indigestion.
- **Do not brush your teeth soon after contact with any acid. Simply rinse with water or bicarbonate of soda and wait at least 20 minutes prior to brushing.**

Prevent tooth abrasion

- Use a soft to medium brush and tooth paste for sensitive teeth (e.g. Sensodyne).
- Start brushing the teeth from the inside surfaces next to the tongue and palate.
- Apply tooth paste directly to sensitive areas after lunch and just before going to bed.
- Keep the toothpaste on the teeth for as long as possible ('spit, don't rinse' out the excess).
- **Do not brush your teeth more than twice a day.**

Use Mouthwashes (also helps prevent decay in conjunction with good diet)

- Use once a week. Duraphat Rinse (Colgate)
- Fluoriguard Daily Rinse

Use special toothpastes (also helps prevent decay in conjunction with good diet)

- Duraphat 2800 ppm
- Duraphat 5000 ppm

Seek further advice from your dentist if the sensitivity persists

- Dentine sensitivity can be caused by other dental problems and this should be checked.
- Dentine tubules can be sealed with resins, varnishes, dentine bonding agents or filling materials.

More recently Tooth Mousse has been found to be effective for tooth surface loss. Apply 2/3 times a day on affected teeth after meals or after cleaning your teeth.