



What causes sensitive teeth?

The part of the tooth we can see has a layer of enamel that protects the softer dentine underneath. If the dentine is exposed, a tooth can become sensitive. This usually happens where the tooth and the gum meet and the enamel layer is much thinner. Here are some causes of sensitivity:

- Brushing too hard ('toothbrush abrasion'), and brushing from side to side, can cause enamel to be worn away - particularly where the teeth meet the gums. The freshly exposed dentine may then become sensitive.
- Dental erosion: this is loss of tooth enamel caused by attacks of acid from acidic food and drinks. If enamel is worn away, the dentine underneath is exposed which may lead to sensitivity.
- Gums may naturally recede (shrink back), and the roots of the teeth will become exposed and can be more sensitive. Root surfaces do not have an enamel layer to protect them.
- Gum disease: a build-up of plaque or tartar can cause the gum to recede down the tooth and even destroy the bony support of the tooth. Pockets can form in the gums around the tooth, making the area difficult to keep clean and the problem worse.
- Tooth grinding: this is a habit which involves clenching and grinding the teeth together. This can cause the enamel of the teeth to be worn away, making the teeth sensitive.
- A cracked tooth or filling: a cracked tooth is one that has become broken. A crack can run from the biting surface of a tooth down towards the root. Extreme temperatures, especially cold, may cause discomfort.
- Tooth bleaching: some patients have sensitivity for a short time during bleaching or afterwards. Discuss this with your dental team before having treatment.

Sweets that treat

Soft drinks the most 'dangerous' factor on tooth wear

A new treat may actually aid oral health. A German firm called Organobalance GMBH will launch a new sweet that claims to fight bad bacteria. It apparently does this by containing probiotic bacteria and stopping harmful bacteria from clinging to the teeth. This new sweet allows for the harmful bacteria to be swallowed and then excreted out of the body.

These sweets use the bacteria called lactobacillus paracasei.

The probiotic bacteria get released after sucking on the sweet. They eventually bind with harmful bacteria to prevent them from sticking to the gumline and enamel.

The information about this product appears in the journal *Probiotics and Antimicrobial Proteins*. The article demonstrated that 45 of the 60 participants showed lower levels of streptococcus mutans bacteria after eating one sweet. The results got better after more sweets were consumed throughout the study.

Tooth decay can generally be prevented by maintaining good oral care through brushing, flossing and visiting the dentist. If these sweets are proven to be effective, then this will be another way to fight off tooth decay.

Researchers have found that adults with moderate and severe tooth wear consumed more soft drinks and fruit juices daily than other groups. Dental erosion is the loss of tooth enamel caused by acid attack from sugary foods and drinks. Enamel is the hard, protective coating of the tooth, which protects the sensitive dentine underneath. When the enamel is worn away, the dentine underneath is exposed, which may lead to pain and sensitivity. The more severe cases of tooth wear can often result in invasive and costly treatment so it is important that we keep to a good oral hygiene routine to make sure these future problems do not arise.



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Problem Wisdom Teeth

If part of the wisdom tooth has appeared through the gum and part of it is still covered, the gum may become sore and perhaps swollen. This is called 'pericoronitis'. Bacteria and bits of food can collect under the gum edge, and it will be difficult to clean the area properly. If there is not enough room, the wisdom tooth may try to come through, but will get stuck against the tooth in front of it. The wisdom tooth will be at an angle, and will be described by the dentist as 'impacted'.

This is a temporary problem that can be dealt with by using mouthwashes, special cleaning methods and possibly antibiotics. If the problem keeps coming back, it may be better to have the tooth removed.



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Understanding Bruxism

In most instances, teeth grinding is a nighttime problem - if you have bruxism, you're likely doing it while you're asleep and might not realize it. Many times, someone's spouse or partner is the first one to notice the bruxism due to the terrible grinding sounds it makes when the person is sleeping. Researchers still aren't exactly sure why bruxism occurs in some people, but there are a number of theories. Studies have suggested that nocturnal bruxism is mediated by the central nervous system and is linked to sleep arousal patterns, brain chemistry, certain drugs, alcohol, smoking, and genetic factors. The most common symptom, of course, is the grinding itself, but this leads to a number of secondary concerns. The signs and symptoms of bruxism are teeth wearing, jaw muscle tenderness, head muscle tenderness around the temple area, jaw muscle swelling, morning headaches, tongue indentation, and pain or tenderness during muscle movement. If left untreated, it will lead to symptoms such as headaches, both tension and migraine, earaches, ear congestion, buzzing or hissing in the ear, ringing in the ear, tinnitus, hot- and cold-sensitive teeth, cracked or broken teeth, loose teeth or crowns, sore and painful jaw muscles, and worn-down teeth. In some instances, the damage to teeth is permanent and may lead to extensive restorations of teeth or tooth loss. It may also lead to chronic muscle and jaw joint pain, which can lead to depression and get worse with stress. Though bruxism can't be cured, it can be treated to minimize the impact on your teeth, jaw, and surrounding muscles. The primary treatment is to get fitted by your dentist for a nighttime mouth guard.



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