

# FAQ's About Sensitive Teeth

## **Why are my teeth sensitive?**

Hot and cold temperature changes cause your teeth to expand and contract. Over time, your teeth can develop microscopic cracks that allow these sensations to seep through to the nerves. Exposed areas of the tooth can cause pain and even affect or change your eating, drinking and breathing habits. Taking a spoonful of ice cream, for example, can be a painful experience for people with sensitive teeth.

## **Is tooth sensitivity a common condition?**

Sensitive teeth is one of the most common complaints among dental patients. At least 45 million adults in the U.S. and 5 million Canadians suffer at some time from sensitive teeth.

## **How can I avoid sensitivity?**

Some toothpastes contain abrasive ingredients that may be too harsh for people who have sensitive teeth. Ingredients found in some whitening toothpastes that lighten and/or remove certain stains from enamel, and sodium pyrophosphate, the key ingredient in tartar-control toothpastes, may increase tooth sensitivity.

## **What can I do about sensitive teeth?**

Tooth sensitivity can be reduced by using desensitizing toothpaste, applying sealants and other desensitizing ionization and filling materials including fluoride by your dentist, and decreasing the intake of acid-containing foods. Tartar control toothpastes will sometimes cause teeth to be sensitive as well as drinking diet soft drinks throughout the day. Avoid using hard bristled toothbrushes and brushing your teeth too hard, which can wear down the tooth's root surface and expose sensitive spots.

## **What can the dentist do for my sensitive teeth?**

Dentists have a variety of regimens to manage tooth hypersensitivity, including both in-office treatments and patient-applied products for home use. If you are diagnosed with dentin hypersensitivity, your dentist may apply a desensitizing agent or a protective coating. You may be prescribed a stannous fluoride gel or over-the-counter desensitizing toothpaste containing fluoride and either potassium nitrate or strontium chloride.

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