

Eggert Family Dentistry

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Sensitive Teeth Caused by Dentin Hypersensitivity

One cause of tooth sensitivity is due to the movement of fluid within tiny tubes (pores) located in the dentin (the middle layer) of the tooth. When the hard enamel surface (the outer layer) of a tooth is worn down or the gums have receded, the surfaces of these tiny tubes can become exposed, resulting in pain while eating or drinking. The pain is especially prevalent with extremely cold or hot foods. This type of tooth sensitivity is called dentin hypersensitivity and is one of the most common complaints among dental patients. Individuals with dentin hypersensitivity find that the pain is often triggered by hot, cold, sour, or sweet beverages or foods, forceful brushing or flossing, or even by cold air.

To help avoid dentin hypersensitivity, it is important to limit your consumption of acidic beverages and food. Acidic foods and drinks like soda, orange juice, and citric fruits wear down the hard enamel layer, exposing the dentin and the tiny tubes. Also, conditions like bulimia nervosa and acid reflux can have similar erosive effects on tooth enamel. Abrasion of the enamel from aggressive use of a toothbrush can also lead to dentin hypersensitivity.

To help avoid the pain caused by dentin hypersensitivity, make sure to use a soft (or extra soft)-bristled toothbrush and brush using small circular motions along your gumline. There are also toothpastes designed for sensitive teeth. Be sure to use the toothpaste daily for the course of an entire tube (6-8 weeks) in order to notice the best effects.

Not all teeth with dentin hypersensitivity will respond to the desensitizing toothpaste. If this is the case for you, there are in-office applications that can be used like topical agents or sealants.

Tooth sensitivity is not always caused by dentin hypersensitivity. Other causes of tooth sensitivity are more serious and will require intervention by us, your dental team. These causes include bruxism (clenching and/or grinding of the teeth), tooth decay, cracked tooth syndrome, irreversible pulpitis of the nerve in the tooth, or a tooth abscess.