

Smiles Better

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Have you a twinge in a tooth?

I hope you all had a lovely Christmas! This time of year is always busy for dentists, we see lots of patients with broken teeth or lost fillings due to all those boxes of sweets which seem to be everywhere this time of year...the toffees are the worst!!

The cold and frosty weather also brings patients complaining of sensitive teeth!! Tooth sensitivity is something that all of us have experienced at some time or another. It can be a little twinge in the tooth or a sharp shooting pain that can last for hours, it usually occurs after the consumption of hot, cold or sweet foods and drinks, or when out in the cold air.

SO WHAT EXACTLY IS HAPPENING IN OUR TEETH TO GIVE US SENSITIVITY?

Teeth are made up of dentine and enamel. Enamel is the strong outer layer which protects the inner dentine layer. Dentine is full of little tunnels that lead to the nerve, these tunnels are very sensitive to temperature and pressure, so if the dentine is exposed you will experience discomfort on eating or drinking as the tunnels have become stimulated and in turn stimulate the nerve!! Ouch!!

WHAT CAUSES THE DENTINE TO BE EXPOSED?

There are several causes that that can lead to dentine exposure....sensitivity!!

Brushing too hard: Excessive vigorous brushing, or brushing too hard with a tough bristled toothbrush over time will cause the gums to shrink (recede) and expose the roots of teeth which are made of dentine

Gum Disease: Gums become swollen and infected, if untreated the ligaments and fibres in the gums become weak and the gums begin to recede, again causing

dentine to be exposed

Bruxism: People who grind and clench their teeth quickly wear down the enamel surface to expose dentine

Diet: Foods with high acid content can erode enamel and cause sensitivity

Decay: If you have a hole or cavity in your tooth the dentine will be exposed

Age: As we age our gums recede and the enamel becomes thinner due to wear and tear

Dental procedures: after scaling, fillings or whitening it is normal to have a little sensitivity. This type of sensitivity is not long

lasting and disappears after a few weeks.

SO WHAT CAN BE DONE TO COMBAT TOOTH SENSITIVITY?

Make sure you visit your dentist regularly to ensure healthy teeth and gums. Your dentist or hygienist will notice any signs of toothbrush abrasion or grinding. They can advise you on the best toothbrush and toothbrushing technique to use, and may make a mouthguard to protect teeth and control your grinding habit.

If your diets high in acids e.g. fizzy drinks, fruit, tea or herbal teas I'd advise you limit these and start using a sensitive tooth paste such as Proenamel. A mouthwash is also beneficial for sensitive teeth, ensure it is pH neutral and alcohol free. Some mouthwashes can be acidic because of the

high alcohol content so be aware.

If your gums have receded and your are sensitive or one tooth in particular is sensitive I recommend the following toothpastes to my

patients: Pro-relief from Colgate or Rapid Relief from Sensodyne. These toothpastes are great as a toothpaste or for rubbing on the affected tooth. I advise my patients to place the toothpaste on the affected teeth and leave for 60 seconds then brush as normal.

If you have any concerns regarding sensitivity and you've tried the recommended toothpastes and are still in discomfort then do contact your dentist.

I hope this has been beneficial, have a lovely 2011!! **Nuala**

