

Tooth Sensitivity

If you have experienced sharp pain when you eat/drink hot, cold, sweet and sour food/drinks, or when you brush/floss your teeth, you may be suffering from tooth sensitivity provided that you do not have oral problems such as tooth decay.



Even if you do not have any sensitive teeth, you are encouraged to read this pamphlet to prevent it.

What is Tooth Sensitivity?

Tooth sensitivity is mainly caused by exposure of dentine of the tooth to the oral environment. The dentine has numerous fine tubules which connect to the pulp. When the nerve endings in the pulp are irritated by external stimulus, sharp pain is felt.

Dentine exposure

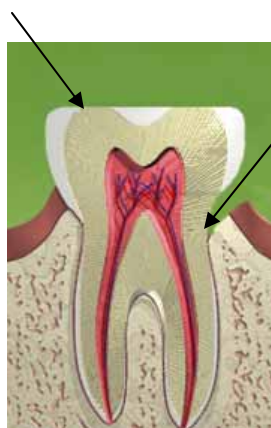
- Dentine Exposure at the crown of the tooth

The outermost layer of the crown is enamel. If the enamel has been damaged, the dentine will not be protected.

- Dentine Exposure at the root of the tooth

The dentine of the root of a tooth is covered by the gum. If there is gum recession, the dentine of the root will be exposed.

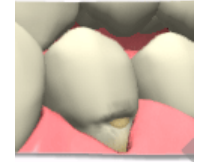
Dentine Exposure at the crown of the tooth



Dentine Exposure at the root of the tooth

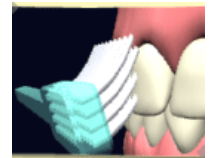
Dentine Exposure is caused by:

- Using a toothbrush with hard bristles.
- Brushing the teeth with excessive force or incorrect brushing technique, leading to gum recession and abrasion of the root surface.
- Periodontal disease, resulting from gum recession and exposure of root surfaces
- Acid erosion of enamel due to frequent intake of highly acidic food or drinks.
- Habitual teeth grinding which wears off the enamel.



Management of tooth sensitivity

- Consult the dentist and learn the correct tooth brushing technique to prevent further abrasion of root surfaces.
- Use desensitizing toothpaste to relieve tooth sensitivity. Please consult your dentist before purchasing or using desensitizing toothpaste.
- If dentine has been exposed, the dentist can apply topical fluoride or put a filling over the exposed surface to reduce the sensitivity.
- If you habitually grind your teeth, the dentist may fabricate a “night guard” for you to wear over the teeth to prevent continual attrition of teeth.
- Other than tooth sensitivity, dental problems such as tooth decay, gum disease and cracked tooth may also lead to toothache. Therefore, if you have a toothache, please consult your dentist to find out the reasons behind it.



Prevention of tooth sensitivity

- Brush your teeth with a soft-bristle toothbrush
- Brush gently with correct a tooth brushing technique
- Prevent gum disease by brushing your teeth twice a day and using dental floss daily to thoroughly remove the dental plaque on the tooth surfaces.
- Avoid biting on hard foodstuff such as bone or nuts to prevent enamel fracture.
- Avoid frequent intake of highly acidic food or drinks such as fruit juices, sports drinks, soft drinks, yogurt, red wine, white wine, etc., to prevent tooth erosion.
- Prevent tooth grinding by sleeping well and doing exercise regularly to relieve stress from daily life.



Oral Health Education Unit
Department of Health