



Why are my teeth sensitive to cold?

With summer in full swing, do you find yourself cringing in pain as you take a sip of an ice-cold beverage or bite into a frozen treat? When patients often come into our practice asking about their sensitive teeth, the first thing we ask is, is it specific to a particular tooth or generalized to a larger area?

If your cold sensitivity is more generalized, then you may be suffering from one of the following causes:

Gum recession. Gum tissue covers and protects sensitive root surfaces. When that gum tissue pulls away from the teeth, however, sensitivity can result. Gum recession can occur from multiple causes.

A common cause we often see is grinding or clenching, which many patients do in their sleep often without their knowledge. This can cause considerable damage to the teeth as well as recession of gum tissue.

Another cause is gum disease or periodontal disease. When periodontal disease sets in, the bone which supports our teeth can slowly be lost. As the bone which supports it is lost, gum tissue can start to recede and expose sensitive tooth structure.

Tooth erosion and wear. Tooth enamel is considered the strongest substance in our body. However, over time, it can wear down, or attrit, due to too much contact with other teeth or erode due to prolonged exposure to an acidic environment.

Wearing, or attrition of teeth can be caused by nighttime grinding or clenching as mentioned earlier or an

incorrect bite which can cause teeth to damage each other and wear unevenly over time.

Erosion of teeth is caused by acid exposure. We see this occur most frequently in patients with Reflux disease or those who drink a lot of acidic beverages such as soda. Erosion can even occur among swimmers due to prolonged exposure to chlorinated water and those with lemon sucking habits or a history of frequent emesis (vomiting).

Sensitivity localized to a particular tooth may arise from following:

Cavity. Most patients will not feel a small cavity. As the cavity gets bigger, however, sensitivity to cold and sweets can develop.

Recent dental work. After dental work, it is normal for a nerve inside a tooth to become inflamed resulting in cold sensitivity. In most cases, the sensitivity will resolve in a few weeks.

An inflamed nerve. Sometimes as a nerve inside a tooth is unhealthy and going bad, one of the first signs will be a sensitivity to cold. This is particularly the case if your tooth remains cold for a while after contacting something cold.

In some cases, the sensitivity may be temporary and resolve without treatment. If it persists, however, consult your dentist who can help you identify the cause of your tooth sensitivity and offer treatment options. Until you can see your dentist, a desensitizing toothpaste such as Sensodyne may provide some relief.



Élan Dental
of South Riding

Live Life with a Smile

24560 SOUTHPOINT DRIVE, SUITE 160, ALDIE, VA 20105
(571) 445-5551

WWW.ELANDENTALSOUTHRIDING.COM