

Do you cringe from discomfort or pain when you drink a hot beverage or bite into a popsicle? If so, you may be suffering from sensitive teeth. Tooth sensitivity is a fairly common problem triggered by hot or cold foods and drinks, or even by breathing cold air.

### What causes sensitive teeth?

- Exposed dentin is usually to blame. Dentin is the tissue that makes up the core of each tooth.
- On the crown of the tooth a protective coating of enamel covers the dentin. When this enamel wears away or decays, the dentin becomes exposed and vulnerable to sensations, including pain.
- Periodontal (gum) disease — an infection of the gums and bone that support the teeth — may also be responsible.
- Gum disease or even too vigorous brushing can cause the gums to recede, leaving the root surfaces exposed, and causing pain.
- If gum disease isn't treated, it can progress until the bone and other tooth supporting tissues are damaged.



### How your dentist can help you manage sensitivity

Your dentist will examine your teeth, look for causes of sensitivity, and make treatment recommendations. A dentist can measure the severity of your sensitive teeth by spraying air across each area of your teeth to determine the exact location of sensitivity.

- If the sensitivity is caused by clenching or grinding, your dentist may recommend a mouth guard.
- Products for home use include desensitizing toothpastes and mouth rinses.
- In-office procedures include application of desensitizing agents or protective sealants.
- If gum tissue has been lost from the root (gum recession), your dentist may recommend a surgical gum graft to cover the root, protect the tooth, and reduce the sensitivity.
- In cases in which hypersensitivity is severe and persistent and cannot be treated by other means, your dentist may recommend a filling to eliminate the problem.