



DENTIN SENSITIVITY

Yours is a special problem that, frankly we don't know much about. Dentin sensitivity is a challenge. It's not uncommon-as many as 10 million people in the US may suffer-but its cause still has us scratching our collective dental heads. Here's what we do know.

Dentin sensitivity starts when the gum recedes around a tooth. This can come naturally with age or be aggravated by abrasive toothpastes and overbrushing. Some people with gum disease develop dentin sensitivity.

Without the protective gum tissue, the root area, or dentin, is exposed to contact with heat, cold, touch, and the stimuli of sweet and sour. What puzzles dentistry is how pain is conveyed through dentin. There are some nerve endings on the periphery, but none in the dentin proper. So why is there pain?

As it is, the most effective treatments are administered here, at the office: potassium nitrate, strontium chloride, fluoride compounds, and even formaldehyde. In severe cases, we may apply adhesive restorative material to cover the exposed dentin and bring you some relief.

At home, you can try desensitizing toothpastes. Different individuals achieve different results with these products, but they're definitely worth a try. Dentin sensitivity seems to recur in cycles, so don't be surprised if you find your toothpaste works fine one day and seems less effective the next. One thing for sure: plaque aggravates pain. So it's important to find a way to brush, even if it's a little uncomfortable.

We don't have all the answers yet. Meanwhile, don't hesitate to call when you're having a bout of sensitivity.