4 Things to Avoid If You Have Sensitive Teeth | Core Dental

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Details:

If you have sensitive teeth, it helps to avoid four common triggers: very hot or very cold food and drinks, sugary food and drinks, acidic drinks, and teeth grinding. Tooth sensitivity, formally called dentine hypersensitivity, happens when the enamel that protects your teeth becomes thinner or your gums recede, exposing the dentine underneath. At Core Dental we recommend that you talk to your dentist or hygienist about sensitivity, because the cause differs from person to person and treatment depends on your own examination.

What is tooth sensitivity?

Tooth sensitivity, formally known as dentine hypersensitivity, occurs when the enamel protecting your teeth becomes thinner. This exposes the dentine surface underneath and reduces the protection that enamel and gums normally provide. Dentine contains tiny channels that lead towards the nerve of the tooth, so heat, cold, sweetness or touch can cause a short, sharp pain. Sensitivity can affect one tooth or several, and many people experience it at some point in their lives.

Why should you avoid very hot and very cold food and drinks?

Sensitive teeth usually react to temperature. Foods and drinks such as hot soups, hot drinks and ice blocks are likely to trigger discomfort, so it can help to avoid them or to let them reach a more moderate temperature first. A toothpaste made for sensitive teeth may also help you manage this when you use it regularly, and your dentist or hygienist can suggest a product that suits you. You can read more in our article on which toothpaste to use .

Why should people with sensitive teeth avoid sugary food and drinks?

Sensitive teeth often react to sweet foods, especially when tooth decay is present. Sugar feeds the bacteria that cause decay, and sugary food can become stuck in existing cavities and irritate the tooth. Reducing sugary food and drinks, and brushing and cleaning between your teeth, helps protect your teeth. If sweet foods trigger pain in one particular tooth, please see us, because it may be a sign of a cavity that needs attention. Our article on snacks that help prevent tooth decay has more ideas.

Are acidic drinks bad for sensitive teeth?

Yes, they can be. Acidic drinks such as fruit juice, soft drinks and wine can soften and wear away tooth structure, which exposes more dentine and can increase sensitivity. Water and herbal teas are kinder to your teeth, so it helps to replace sugary soft drinks and energy drinks with these alternatives. Read more in our article on the effects of acidic drinks on tooth enamel .

How does teeth grinding affect sensitive teeth?

Teeth grinding, also known as bruxism, is a common condition that often goes undiagnosed until clear signs appear. Tooth wear from regular grinding exposes more dentine and overloads the teeth, which can make them more sensitive. At your regular check-up, your dentist can look for evidence of grinding, such as tooth wear or fractured teeth.

Causes of bruxism can include stress, certain sleep disorders, smoking, alcohol, caffeine and some prescription medicines. If you suspect any of these are contributing, please talk to your dentist. Our articles on how to stop grinding your teeth and splints your dentist may recommend explain the options.

When should you see a dentist about sensitive teeth?

Please book an appointment if sensitivity is new, lasts longer than a short time, affects one tooth in particular, or is accompanied by swelling, bleeding gums or ongoing pain. Sensitivity can have several causes, including worn enamel, gum recession, a cracked tooth or decay, and each needs a different approach. At Core Dental we examine your teeth and gums, explain what we find, and quote before treatment starts. If you have severe pain with facial swelling or difficulty breathing or swallowing, call 000.

How can we help?

Our dentists and hygienists look after sensitive teeth at all nine of our practices. We offer check-ups, hygiene care, fillings and other treatment, with interest-free payment plans where suitable. Call us on 13 13 16 to make an appointment, or read about dental check-ups and hygiene appointments .

Sensitivity is a symptom with a short list of causes

Avoiding four things is sound advice, and it works better once you know which of the possible causes you have — because two of them need treatment rather than avoidance.

Cause one: enamel worn away by acid, exposing the layer underneath. The Victorian Department of Health describes the progression: "When dental erosion is advanced, the enamel may wear away, revealing the underlying surface known as dentine; these areas appear yellow on the tooth surface. These areas and any exposed tooth root surfaces can become sensitive to hot, cold and sweet foods and drinks due to the acid damage (or dental erosion)."

So yellow patches plus sensitivity to hot, cold and sweet is a recognisable pattern, not a coincidence. The Department also notes an early sign that is easy to miss: erosion causes "loss of tooth surface, leading to a smooth, shiny appearance", and "fillings may become more prominent if the surrounding tooth surface is dissolving".

Cause two: decay that has progressed. "As decay gets worse, people often experience sensitivity to sweet, cold or hot food and drinks. If you feel this kind of discomfort, speak to your dentist as soon as possible to have the decay treated."

That is the sentence that makes avoidance insufficient on its own. The same symptom can mean a cavity, and a cavity does not improve by being protected from cold drinks. The Department's next step is explicit about where it goes if ignored: "If your tooth has been aching then decay may have reached the centre of the tooth and the nerve inside. When this happens, root canal treatment may be needed to keep the tooth in your mouth."

Cause three: a dry mouth, which changes where decay happens. The Department's dry mouth page is specific: "Because they are lacking the protection of saliva, people with dry mouth are more likely to get tooth decay and are more prone to get decay along the gum line (tooth root surface)." And on why that

site is worse: "Unlike enamel (the outer tooth layer), dentine (the inner tooth layer) is less resistance to acids and can decay quickly, especially without enough saliva to protect it." It adds that "people with dry mouth may also develop decay on the lower front teeth, which are normally well protected by saliva produced from beneath the tongue".

Cause four: wear from grinding, usually alongside acid. Acid "can also soften the tooth surface, making it easier for it to be worn away by abrasion or teeth grinding. This is known as acid wear or erosive tooth wear." The Department's tip for anyone in that position is to "wear a custom-made dental splint if you grind your teeth at night".

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Dry mouth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 9 September 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

A fifth thing to avoid: brushing at the wrong moment

Lists of things to avoid with sensitive teeth usually cover what goes in your mouth. The most avoidable damage is something you do afterwards with good intentions.

Do not brush in the half hour after anything acidic. The Department's instruction: "Make sure you have neutralised any acid before brushing your teeth. Wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth, to allow your saliva to neutralise the acid in your mouth."

On already-sensitive teeth this matters twice over, because the surface is thin where it hurts. Brushing a softened surface removes tooth rather than plaque, and the exposed dentine the Department describes is the layer that is "less resistance to acids" to begin with.

And when you do brush, the specification is gentle. "Use a soft-bristled toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste." "Brush your teeth gently, but thoroughly." For electric brushes: "Do not press too hard or scrub, let the brush do the work."

What to do in that thirty minutes instead. The Department's neutralising options are rinsing with water or a fluoride mouth rinse; a sodium bicarbonate rinse, "one teaspoon of baking soda in a glass of water"; or "consuming dairy products, such as unsweetened milk and cheese".

On drinks, the list is longer than fizzy drinks. Common high-acid foods and drinks the Department names include "soft drinks (including sugar-free)", "energy drinks", "sports drinks", "citrus fruits (lemons, limes, oranges)", "kombucha", "lemon-flavoured drinks or teas", "fruit-flavoured lollies", "fruit juices", "cordials", "vitamin waters", "vitamin C tablets", "vinegar" and "alcoholic drinks". Two of those are worth singling out for anyone managing sensitivity: "avoid adding lemon, lime or citrus to water", and "do not chew vitamin C tablets. If necessary, take vitamin C supplements that are swallowed whole."

Its general rule is about contact time rather than abstinence: "Reduce how often you eat or drink anything acidic and don't leave it sitting in your mouth for too long."

Where saliva fits, and where it stops. "Saliva is a powerful natural defence against erosion. Saliva can wash acids out of your mouth into the stomach, it can neutralise acid, and it can repair the early stages of erosion. However, it cannot grow back the lost tooth surface." So hydration helps — "stay well hydrated, as this improves your saliva" — but it does not undo wear that has already happened.

And the point at which avoidance stops being the answer. The Department's treatment line for erosion is direct: "If your teeth have had dental erosion, the lost surface of the tooth may need to be replaced with fillings or crowns." Its reason for having it looked at rather than managed at home is that the cause has to be identified: "When the signs of dental erosion are detected, it is very important to determine the cause and modify it." On timing, it asks for a visit "every six to twelve months" so erosion can be found early, the cause determined, and further wear prevented.

If a persistent dry mouth is part of the picture, the Department treats that as its own investigation: "If you have a constant dry mouth, consult your dentist or doctor to find the cause."

Sources: Better Health Channel (Victorian Department of Health), Dental erosion, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 22 October 2025); Tooth decay, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 28 June 2025); Teeth and mouth care, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 25 July 2025); Dry mouth, betterhealth.vic.gov.au (reviewed 9 September 2025). All accessed 6 November 2026.

Frequently asked questions

Is tooth sensitivity common?

Yes. Many people experience tooth sensitivity at some point. Because it can be caused by worn enamel, gum recession, decay or a cracked tooth, it is worth having it checked rather than assuming it will settle on its own.

Can sensitive teeth be cured?

Sensitivity can often be managed, and the right approach depends on the cause. Your dentist may suggest changes to your brushing, a toothpaste for sensitive teeth, a filling, or a splint if you grind. We cannot promise a specific result, so we examine you first.

Is sensitive teeth toothpaste worth using?

A toothpaste made for sensitive teeth is commonly used to help manage sensitivity when brushed regularly. Your dentist or hygienist can recommend a suitable product, and a fluoride toothpaste also helps protect your teeth.

Why are my teeth sensitive after a filling?

Some sensitivity can follow a filling and often settles. If it lasts or becomes worse, please contact us. You can read more in our article on tooth sensitivity after a filling .

Does grinding my teeth make them sensitive?

It can. Grinding wears the enamel and overloads the teeth, exposing more dentine. Your dentist can check for signs of wear at your check-up and discuss options such as a splint.

Could sensitivity mean I have a cavity rather than worn enamel?

It can, which is why avoiding cold drinks is not a plan on its own. The Victorian Department of Health: "As decay gets worse, people often experience sensitivity to sweet, cold or hot food and drinks. If you feel this kind of discomfort, speak to your dentist as soon as possible to have the decay treated."

What does acid-worn enamel look like?

The Department describes two stages. Early on, erosion causes "loss of tooth surface, leading to a smooth, shiny appearance". Later, "the enamel may wear away, revealing the underlying surface known as dentine; these areas appear yellow on the tooth surface", and those areas "can become sensitive to hot, cold and sweet foods and drinks". It also notes that "fillings may become more

prominent if the surrounding tooth surface is dissolving".

Should I brush straight away if my teeth feel sensitive after a drink?

No. "Wait at least 30 minutes after the acid exposure before brushing your teeth, to allow your saliva to neutralise the acid in your mouth." Brushing a softened surface wears it away. Rinse with water, a fluoride mouth rinse, or a baking soda rinse instead, or have some unsweetened milk or cheese.

Does a dry mouth cause sensitivity?

It changes where decay forms, which is often where sensitivity is felt. "People with dry mouth are more likely to get tooth decay and are more prone to get decay along the gum line (tooth root surface)", and dentine "is less resistance to acids and can decay quickly, especially without enough saliva to protect it". A constant dry mouth is something the Department asks you to have investigated: "consult your dentist or doctor to find the cause".

Does grinding make sensitive teeth worse?

The two compound each other. Acid "can also soften the tooth surface, making it easier for it to be worn away by abrasion or teeth grinding". Among the Department's tips for minimising wear is to "wear a custom-made dental splint if you grind your teeth at night".

Which drinks should I cut back on?

The Department's high-acid list includes soft drinks "including sugar-free", energy drinks, sports drinks, citrus fruits, kombucha, lemon-flavoured drinks or teas, fruit juices, cordials, vitamin waters and alcoholic drinks. Two specific instructions: "avoid adding lemon, lime or citrus to water", and "do not chew vitamin C tablets. If necessary, take vitamin C supplements that are swallowed whole."

Do I have to give these up completely?

The Department's rule is about frequency and contact, not abstinence: "Reduce how often you eat or drink anything acidic and don't leave it sitting in your mouth for too long."

Will my enamel grow back if I stop?

No. Saliva "can repair the early stages of erosion. However, it cannot grow back the lost tooth surface." Where surface has been lost, "the lost surface of the tooth may need to be replaced with fillings or crowns".

What kind of toothbrush should I use?

"Use a soft-bristled toothbrush with fluoride toothpaste", brushing "gently, but thoroughly". With an electric brush, "do not press too hard or scrub, let the brush do the work".

How often should sensitivity be checked?

The Department's interval for erosion review is "every six to twelve months", and it says what matters most at that visit: "When the signs of dental erosion are detected, it is very important to determine the cause and modify it."

Related services and further reading

Dental check-ups

Dental hygiene

Fillings and restorations

Acid attack: the effects of acidic drinks on tooth enamel

How do I know which toothpaste to use?

How can I stop grinding my teeth?

Brushing teeth: are you doing it right?

Tooth sensitivity after a filling

Core Dental at a glance

Nine Core Dental clinics across Melbourne: Southbank, South Melbourne, Caroline Springs, Carrum Downs, Epping, Wyndham, Berwick, Bayside and Glenferrie.

Open six days a week: Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings.

We quote before treatment starts and offer interest-free payment plans, with HICAPS on-site claiming.

Call 13 13 16 or book online.

Contact Core Dental

Phone	13 13 16
Booking	Online through your practice page, or call 13 13 16
Hours	Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm, Saturday mornings, Sunday closed

This article is general in nature and does not replace advice from a registered dental practitioner who has examined you. Results, recovery times and potential risks vary for each individual. Seek advice from a qualified, AHPRA-registered practitioner before proceeding.

What causes sensitive teeth?

Sensitive teeth are usually caused by thinning enamel or gum recession, which exposes the dentine beneath. Decay, a cracked tooth and tooth grinding can also contribute. Our Core Dental team examines your teeth to find the cause.

Which foods and drinks should I avoid with sensitive teeth?

With sensitive teeth, we suggest avoiding very hot or very cold items, sugary foods and drinks, and acidic drinks such as fruit juice, soft drinks and wine. Water and herbal teas are kinder to your teeth.

Why do sweet foods hurt sensitive teeth?

Sweet foods can trigger pain in sensitive teeth, particularly where decay is present. Sugar feeds decay-causing bacteria and can lodge in cavities. If one tooth reacts to sweet food, book a Core Dental examination.

Can acidic drinks make tooth sensitivity worse?

Yes. Acidic drinks can soften and wear away tooth structure, exposing more dentine and increasing sensitivity. At Core Dental we suggest replacing sugary soft drinks and energy drinks with water or herbal tea.

What is bruxism?

Bruxism is the medical term for teeth grinding. It often goes unnoticed until tooth wear or fractured teeth appear. Core Dental dentists look for these signs at check-ups and can discuss options such as splints.

Who should I see about sensitive teeth at Core Dental?

You can see one of our dentists or hygienists at any Core Dental practice. They will examine your teeth and gums, explain the likely cause and talk through options before any treatment starts.

How do I book a Core Dental appointment for sensitive teeth?

Call Core Dental on 13 13 16 or book online through your nearest practice page. We are open Monday to Friday 8.00am to 6.00pm and Saturday mornings, and we quote before treatment starts.

Does Core Dental offer payment plans for dental treatment?

Yes. Core Dental offers interest-free payment plans so you can spread the cost of treatment over time. Eligibility terms apply, and our team will explain them and quote before treatment starts.