

GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING TOOTH PAIN

A TOOTH RESPONDS TO HOT OR COLD LIQUIDS WITH A 'SHORT AND SHARP' SHOCK

As long as the discomfort lasts less than 10 seconds the problem has a good chance of resolving without any treatment. However, if the sensitivity does not resolve in a couple of weeks consult your dentist.

You Should

- Use toothpaste with extra fluoride or that is specific for sensitive teeth
- Apply a pea-sized amount of toothpaste on the sensitive area three times per day
- Brush with less vigour and only use a toothbrush with ultra-soft bristles
- If you have a night guard, start using it every night

Consult your dentist if

- The sensitivity to hot or cold lingers for more than 10 seconds
- Spontaneous pain develops
- If the sensitivity does not improve after two weeks

A TOOTH BECOMES HYPERSENSITIVE TO HOT OR COLD LIQUIDS AFTER A DENTAL APPOINTMENT

No matter how minor, every treatment on a tooth is an injury that the pulp (soft tissue) must recover from. Most often the sensitivity to hot, cold or bite will spontaneously resolve after one to two weeks.

You Should

- Consult your dentist if the pain is severe and interfering with your eating and sleeping habits
- Monitor the tooth if the pain is a minor irritation
- Consult your dentist if the hypersensitivity does not show obvious signs of improvement after one to two weeks

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SHARP PAIN IS FELT WHEN BITING ON A TOOTH

This is more of a concern than transient hot/cold sensitivity. There are a number of possible causes with a 'high filling' being the most common and least problematic.

You Should

- Consult your dentist without delay
- Your dentist may refer you to an endodontist for a second opinion, especially if a fracture is suspected



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A TOOTH HAS SENSITIVITY THAT LINGERS FOR SEVERAL SECONDS AFTER EXPOSURE TO HOT OR COLD LIQUIDS

This is more of a concern than transient hot/cold sensitivity or tenderness to bite. It is likely endodontic treatment will be necessary.

You Should

- Consult your dentist without delay or an endodontist

YOU EXPERIENCE SPONTANEOUS SEVERE PAIN; NOTICE A SWELLING ON THE GUMS, AND/OR THE TOOTH IS HYPERSENSITIVE TO SLIGHT TOUCH

An abscessed tooth is likely present and emergency dental treatment is necessary.

You Should

- Consult a dentist or endodontist immediately
- Ensure that the source of the pain is found and effective treatment is rendered
- Antibiotics may help relieve symptoms over the short-term but are not sufficient for healing to occur
- Seek immediate medical or dental treatment if the swelling becomes obvious on your face

YOU HAVE A DULL ACHE OR PRESSURE IN AN UPPER TOOTH OR JAW

You may have a sinus headache or infection. Also chronic grinding or clenching (i.e. bruxism) can cause these symptoms. If over-the-counter analgesics or sinus medicine does not work, the pain is likely due to a tooth requiring root canal treatment.

You Should

- Consult your dentist for further evaluation
- If the pain does not resolve in a few days consider a second opinion from an endodontist

YOU HAVE CHRONIC PAIN IN THE HEAD, NECK OR EAR

It is possible for a mildly traumatised pulp to cause vague pain in surrounding structures; this is known as referred pain.

You Should

- Consult your dentist and consider a second opinion from an endodontist

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THE 'TO DO' LIST FOR RELIEVING DENTAL PAIN

- Do not ignore minor or transient pain. It may be an early warning sign of a severe toothache.
- Root canal treatment removes the source of pain and provides relief. To delay treatment is to run the risk of unnecessary pain and complications.
- Sharp pain on biting always requires an evaluation by a dentist or endodontist.
- A severe toothache requires an evaluation by a dentist or endodontist within 24 to 48 hours. Antibiotics will not cure the problem but may help relieve pain and prevent a severe swelling.
- If you have a toothache, elevate your head at night.
- If possible take an anti-inflammatory (i.e. Advil) 'by-the-clock' while awake. This compliments the effects of pain medications (i.e. Tylenol).
- Do not let anxiety prevent you from attaining timely treatment; treatment need not be painful or stressful.
- Occasionally the source of supposed tooth pain is not actually a tooth. Sinus infections and neurological disorders can cause aches that are associated with teeth.

Endodontists specialise in diagnosing and treating oral and facial pain. Often a dentist will seek a second opinion from an endodontist regarding pain in the teeth, jaws, or gums. Other professionals in this field include oral medicine specialists, oral surgeons, ear, nose and throat specialists (ENT's), and neurologists.

Proper hygiene and regular check-ups will help you avoid dental pain and complications.



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