

# Keeping Them Sealed

**T**ooth decay can be an uncomfortable — and sometimes expensive — problem to have. It is surprisingly common, too, even for people who pay attention to their dental hygiene.

Fortunately there is a simple solution that can help reduce the risk of tooth decay. Your dentist may be able to apply a sealant to keep food and plaque from causing damage to vulnerable areas of your teeth.

## HOW IT WORKS

Brushing and flossing does a great job removing plaque and food particles from the smooth, flat parts of your teeth. Where they don't do such a good job are on the small grooves and fissures that can trap food and allow plaque to take root.

A professionally applied tooth sealant can fix that. The sealant, a plastic coating that hardens and bonds to your tooth surface, can fill in all those depressions and grooves that toothbrushes can't readily access.

It's especially useful on the chewing surfaces in the back of your mouth, according to the American Dental Association.

## HOW IT IS APPLIED

Applying a sealant is a simple procedure for your dentist. The sealant is applied to your tooth surface like paint, and it forms a strong bond with your tooth enamel when



it hardens.

Sealants don't last forever, though. While they typically last several years under normal chewing conditions, they will likely need to be reapplied eventually. Regular dental checkups will allow your dentist to evaluate the sealant's condition and reapply it if necessary.

## Tips for Preventing Tooth Decay

Key ingredients in preventing tooth decay and maintaining a healthy mouth are:

- Brushing twice a day with an ADA-accepted fluoride toothpaste
- Cleaning between the teeth daily with floss or another interdental cleaner
- Eating a balanced diet and limiting snacks
- Visiting your dentist regularly

— American Dental Association

# Fixing Sensitive Teeth

**D**rinking hot tea or biting into an ice cream sandwich ought to be a pleasant experience, but that's not the case for people who suffer from sensitive teeth.

Experiencing pain when eating hot or cold foods — or while brushing or flossing your teeth — is a common but potentially serious problem that a dentist can help you address.

## WHAT CAUSES IT?

According to the American Dental Association, sensitive teeth can be caused by a variety of conditions. Cavities, or tooth decay, are among the leading causes for sensitive teeth, but it could also be the result of a more serious problem.

Fractured teeth, gum disease, worn fillings, an exposed tooth root and worn tooth enamel are all potential causes for that uncomfortable, painful feeling.

## A CLOSER LOOK

Where does the pain come from? It usually has to do with a problem in the structure of your tooth.

Deep inside your tooth is a layer of material called dentin that helps to protect the tooth's root.

Dentin is usually covered by other layers on the outside of your tooth — enamel above the gums and cementum below them — that help to keep the dentin from being exposed.

Sometimes the outer layer of protection that surrounds the dentin can become damaged or wear away, which lets temperature changes or chemicals from food touch the dentin and work their way directly to the nerve cells and roots of the tooth.

Tooth sensitivity shouldn't be ignored because it's usually the symptom of your tooth's structure breaking down in some way. A dentist can uncover the root cause and recommend a solution to make your life more comfortable and keep your teeth healthier.

## Treating Sensitive Teeth

Sensitive teeth can be treated. The type of treatment will depend on what is causing the sensitivity. Your dentist may suggest one of a variety of treatments:

**Desensitizing toothpaste:** This contains compounds that help block transmission of sensation from the tooth surface to the nerve, and usually requires several applications before the sensitivity is reduced.

**Fluoride gel:** An in-office technique which strengthens tooth enamel and reduces the transmission of sensa-

tions.

**A crown, inlay or bonding:** These may be used to correct a flaw or decay that results in sensitivity.

**Surgical gum graft:** If gum tissue has been lost from the root, this will protect the root and reduce sensitivity.

**Root canal:** If sensitivity is severe and persistent and cannot be treated by other means, your dentist may recommend this treatment to eliminate the problem.

— American Dental Association





# The Right Way to Brush

**Y**ou've heard it since you were a child: Brushing your teeth twice a day is the centerpiece of good oral hygiene.

If you're like most adults, though, you may need a refresher course on the details of how to brush for the best results. Here is what the American Dental Association (ADA) recommends to keep your teeth healthy when brushing.

## THE BASICS

You should use a soft-bristled brush to clean your teeth twice a day. While there are toothbrushes that come in all shapes and sizes available for sale, you should pick the one that best fits the size and shape of your mouth and lets you easily reach all parts of your teeth.

Keep in mind that a worn-out toothbrush won't do a good job cleaning the surface of your teeth. You should get a new toothbrush every three or four months, or even sooner if you see signs that the bristles are fraying.

You should also use an ADA-approved toothpaste with fluoride.

## HOW TO BRUSH

Paying attention to the details of your brushing technique can lead to better results.

First, you should place your toothbrush at a 45-degree angle to your gums, then use short back-and-froth strokes about the same width as your teeth to start cleaning them.

Make sure you brush the outside,

inside and chewing surfaces of all your teeth. When cleaning the inside surfaces, use up-and-down strokes while holding the toothbrush vertically. And if you want fresh breath, you should brush your tongue to remove the bacteria that can collect there.

## OTHER

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Brushing your teeth regularly is just the start of a good dental health.

You should also floss daily to remove the bacteria and food particles that can build up between your teeth, where the toothbrush can't reach.

And you should pay attention to what you eat, because a balanced diet with limited snacks between meals can help to keep your teeth — and your whole body — at peak

health.

Finally, regular visits to the dentist for oral exams and professional cleaning should be a part of any person's oral health routine.

