



Dentist

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Why are my teeth sensitive after a cleaning?

A professional tooth cleaning, also called scaling and polishing, removes plaque and tartar buildup to keep your teeth and gums healthy. Although the procedure is usually quick and painless, it is common for some people to notice temporary tooth sensitivity afterwards. In most cases, this is normal and settles on its own within a few days.

During cleaning, a dentist or dental hygienist uses special instruments to scrape away hardened tartar from both above and below the gum line. While this process is important for preventing gum disease, it can temporarily irritate the gums and expose parts of the tooth that are more sensitive. Under the enamel, the protective outer layer of the tooth, there are tiny channels that lead directly to the nerve. When these areas are exposed or stimulated during cleaning, they may react with short, sharp sensations.

Several factors can increase this sensitivity. People with gum recession may already have exposed tooth roots, which are naturally more sensitive than enamel-covered surfaces. Those who undergo deep cleaning for gum disease may also experience more discomfort because the procedure reaches further below the gum line, where more tissue is affected. In some cases, even the polishing paste used at the end of the cleaning, which has a slightly gritty texture, can leave the teeth feeling temporarily more reactive than usual.

This sensitivity often shows up when eating or drinking something cold, hot, sweet, or acidic. Even brushing the teeth can trigger a brief sting. It usually begins within a few hours after the cleaning, tends to be most noticeable within the first one to three days, and gradually improves. For most people, it disappears completely within a week. However, if there was heavy tartar buildup or significant gum inflammation before the cleaning, healing may take up to two to four weeks as the gums settle and recover.

How to manage

Using a soft-bristled toothbrush can help reduce irritation, especially when paired with a desensitizing toothpaste that contains ingredients such as potassium nitrate. It is also helpful to temporarily avoid foods and drinks that are very hot, very cold, acidic, or high in sugar, as these can trigger discomfort.

Rinsing the mouth with warm salt water can also soothe the gums and promote healing. A simple mixture of one teaspoon of salt in a glass of warm water, used two to three times a day, is often enough to reduce irritation.

Chewing sugar-free gum with xylitol may also help by increasing saliva flow, which naturally protects and cleans the teeth. If discomfort becomes bothersome, over-the-counter pain relief such as ibuprofen may help, but it is best to confirm with your dentist before using any medication.

While mild sensitivity is expected, there are times when it should not be ignored. You should contact your dentist if the sensitivity is severe or lasts longer than two weeks. It is also important to seek advice if you notice swelling, persistent bleeding gums, or any discharge of pus. Constant throbbing pain, pain that spreads to the jaw, or discomfort concentrated in a single tooth may indicate an underlying issue such as a cavity or crack. Similarly, gums that appear to be receding further or teeth that look longer than before should be evaluated.