

# Benefits Spotlight

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## Why so sensitive?

At some point, you may have experienced a little sensitivity when eating, perhaps after enjoying an ice-cold beverage or after biting into something hot. Even breathing a blast of cold air can cause discomfort. Why do some people experience sensitivity while others don't? Here are some common causes of tooth sensitivity.

### Exposed Dentin

Underneath the hard, shiny enamel of each tooth is a protective layer called dentin. Dentin is extremely sensitive, and those who suffer from severe sensitivity may have inadvertently exposed the dentin layer of the tooth. An overly aggressive brushing technique can cause the gums to recede and expose the dentin on the tooth root. This can be a particularly sensitive area.

### Periodontal (Gum) Disease

Periodontal disease can destroy the bone and gum tissue to the point that the sensitive root part of the tooth is exposed. To identify and prevent gum disease early, visit your dentist for regular cleanings and exams.

### Whitening Treatments

From simple whitening toothpastes and rinses to professional in-office applications, many tooth whitening treatments can cause extra sensitivity. If your quest to make your teeth pearly white is affecting their sensitivity, your dentist may recommend fewer applications or a lower-strength treatment.

### Tooth Grinding/Clenching

Sensitivity can also be caused by excessive tooth grinding or clenching. Some patients are unaware they grind or clench their teeth because it only occurs in their sleep. When this is the case, wearing a mouthguard to bed to prevent the unconscious grinding can sometimes solve the problem. Your dentist will have additional suggestions and treatment options.

Most people experience slight tooth sensitivity from time to time. If yours is frequent, interferes with your ability to eat or affects the quality of your daily life, discuss possible treatments with your dentist.

## **On Topic With Dr. Kohn: Oral Health and Autism**

Meet Delta Dental's Vice President of Dental Science and Policy, Bill Kohn, DDS. Formerly the director of the Division of Oral Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Dr. Kohn has timely tips and valuable insights to share as our resident dental expert.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that some form of autism, a complex developmental disability, affects over 3 million Americans. People with autism often have communication difficulties and social/behavioral challenges that make it hard to seek regular dental care. Additionally, they may have motor coordination problems that make daily oral hygiene more difficult. This can lead to periodontal (gum) disease and high levels of tooth decay.

Most children with mild to moderate autism can be successfully cared for in a general dental practice setting, so parents should help children establish a good relationship with the dentist early. Finding a dentist comfortable with and experienced in treating children with developmental disorders can help with home care and successful, positive trips to the dental office. Visit [bit.ly/1Gzc7pZ](https://bit.ly/1Gzc7pZ) for more information and resources on oral health care for people with autism.