

# your HEALTH

## Ouch! But what's the cause of that sharp, sudden sensation?

Dentist **DR ADAM PATEL** answers your questions on sensitive teeth



### WHAT IS TOOTH SENSITIVITY?

TOOTH sensitivity, also known as hypersensitivity, is discomfort in one or more teeth which happens when eating hot, cold or sweet food and drinks.

It can also happen when breathing in cold air.

The sensation can be sharp and sudden and shoot into the nerve endings of your teeth.

### CAN YOU EXPLAIN HOW TOOTH SENSITIVITY OCCURS?

A TOOTH is composed of several layers – the outer layer is enamel and the inner layer is dentine.

The dentine layer contains thousands of tiny tubes leading to the tooth's nerve centre – known as the pulp.

When part of the dentine layer becomes exposed these dentinal tubules, or channels, allow the stimuli – for example, the hot, cold, or sweet food – to reach the nerve in your tooth.

This results in the pain that you feel.

### HOW LONG DOES IT NORMALLY LAST?

SENSITIVITY usually only lasts while the above mentioned stimulating factors are present within the mouth.

This is normally only for a few seconds.

If you experience continuous sensitivity lasting for several minutes or even hours then this may be an indication of a more underlying dental problem and you should have this examined without delay.

### WHO SUFFERS FROM SENSITIVE TEETH?

ANYBODY can suffer from sensitive teeth and it may be precipitated during any time of your life.

However, you are more likely to experience it between the ages of 20 and 40 and there is a slightly higher prevalence in females compared with males.

### WHAT ARE THE MAIN CAUSES?

THERE are several factors that can

lead to tooth sensitivity. These include the following:

■ Toothbrush abrasion – brushing too hard, in an incorrect manner, or using a hard bristled brush can cause wear of the outer enamel layer of tooth and recession of the gums over time.

■ This leads to exposure of the inner dentine layer and thus leads to sensitivity of the tooth.

■ Gum recession – as gums move away from a tooth due to abrasion or gum disease such as periodontitis, the root surface becomes exposed.

■ Root surfaces do not have an enamel layer to protect them and this leads to sensitivity.

■ Dental erosion – this is loss of tooth enamel caused by attacks of acid from acidic food and drinks.

■ If enamel is worn away, the dentine underneath is exposed which may lead to sensitivity.

■ Tooth grinding – this is a habit which involves clenching and grinding the teeth together. This can cause the enamel of the teeth to wear away, exposing the underlying dentine and also making the teeth sensitive.

■ Mouthwashes – long-term use of some mouthwashes can lead to sensitivity.

■ Some over-the-counter mouthwashes contain acids that can worsen tooth sensitivity if you have exposed dentin.

■ The acids further damage the dentin layer of the tooth.

■ Plaque build-up – the presence of plaque on the root surfaces of your teeth can cause sensitivity.

■ Tooth-whitening products or toothpaste with baking soda and peroxide.

■ These products are major contributors to tooth sensitivity.

■ Cracked or chipped teeth – chipped teeth may fill with plaque bacteria or expose dentine tubules and lead to sensitivity.

**I RECENTLY HAD A SCALE AND POLISH CARRIED OUT AND MY TEETH WERE SENSITIVE FOR SEVERAL DAYS AFTER. IS THIS NORMAL?**

YES. Sensitivity can occur following a routine scale and polish, root planing, crown placement, and

following restoration of teeth. Sensitivity caused by dental procedures is temporary and usually disappears within a few weeks.

**I HAD A WHITE FILLING PLACED IN A MOLAR TOOTH ONE WEEK AGO AND THE TOOTH HAS BECOME EXTREMELY SENSITIVE SINCE. IS IT INFECTED OR DAMAGED?**

THIS is normal and part of the healing process following a white filling.

Your dentist may have informed you depending on the size and depth of the filling that you are likely to experience some sensitivity for several days or possibly even weeks.

As the white filling settles it can cause sensitivity to hot and cold foods and drinks but this usually settles within a few weeks.

I would advise you to take anti-inflammatory painkillers in the mean time as this will help ease the symptoms.

For further information and treatment options related to tooth sensitivity, visit Dr Patel's website:

[www.dental-excellenceuk.com](http://www.dental-excellenceuk.com)

**GET IN TOUCH:**  
Have you struggled with a difficult health problem? We want to tell your story. Contact our health correspondent Cathy Buss on 0116 222 4261, e-mail [catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk](mailto:catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk)

THE Leicester Mercury has teamed up with Leicestershire dentist Dr Adam Patel (pictured) to help readers with any dental and oral health problems they might have.

People are invited to send in any questions and Dr Patel will answer a selection of them through a regular column on this page, the Leicester Mercury's Monday health section.

Dr Patel said: "I hope I will be able to help people with information and advice which they can put into practice."

"My experience in seeing patients is that there is quite a lack of dental and oral health information and education."

"Your mouth is the start of your digestive system and people often don't realise there is a distinct link between oral and general health."

"It can also have a big impact on a person's psychological and social wellbeing. Bad oral health is very visible and can impact on aspects of life, from a person's personal life to getting a job."

Dr Patel, who was educated at the City of Leicester School and Sixth Form College, said: "I hope I will be able to help readers with the information I can provide."

Dr Patel's replies should only be used as a reference – he is not a replacement for your own dentist.

If you have a query you would like to raise, please summarise it in about 200 words and e-mail it to the address below. Put "health questions" in the subject line.

Alternatively, send your 200-word summary to Cathy Buss, Health Questions, Leicester Mercury, St George Street, Leicester, LE1 9FQ.

Please note, an edited version of the information you send us might appear on this page.

Please include a contact name and phone number in case we have any queries about your submission.

These details will not be published.

Dr Patel will not be able to send personal responses to letters. [catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk](mailto:catherinebuss@leicestermercury.co.uk)



**WIN-WIN:** As well making our lives more interesting, hobbies can help prolong them



## How to live longer without taking all the fun out of life

WHEN it comes to living longer, we usually think about the stuff we should cut out, such as biscuits, alcohol and takeaways.

But what about the things we should take up, or be getting more of?

While it's wise to eat healthily and quit smoking, to give yourself the longest innings possible, you don't have to miss out on all the fun.

In fact, one of the best ways to live longer is to take up a hobby you enjoy.

Here are some that will really boost your quality, and potentially length, of life.

### READING

GETTING stuck into a book can reduce your stress levels by 69 per cent (warding off heart attacks in the process), it bumps up your vocabulary, keeps your brain active with problem solving, enhances concentration and even makes it easier to get to sleep.

Also, in some schools of thought, you can live hundreds of lives vicariously through the characters you read about. Add that to the tally!

### PLAYING CHESS

YOUR brain will thank you for taking up chess. After all, it's a mental game using both sides of it; it also boosts cognitive function, strategic thinking, memory and problem solving. And handily doesn't put any extra pressure on your joints either!

### DANCING

DANCING releases endorphins, cuts stress, improves flexibility and has even been shown to make you smarter as it pushes you to keep getting better, simultaneously boosting cognitive acuity. Also, it's fun!

It helps you top up on vitamin D too, and working directly with the earth can also bolster a positive connection with the world around you – all good for your mental wellbeing.

It's also cheaper, requires dexterity and boosts self-esteem, plus, if you're good at it, you will end up spending more time with friends and family, which boosts overall feelings of happiness and wellbeing. Although, the odd takeaway won't kill you either!

Having a creature to care for – that cares back – has also been found to improve mental wellbeing, hence the importance and effectiveness of animal assisted therapy in hospitals and nursing homes.

Swimming is low impact but works every muscle in the body; it also lowers stress, gives you time and space to think and improves sleep. You can also build up your stamina and strength at a noticeable pace, making it easy to set targets and keep on achieving them.

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### GARDENING

GETTING outside – whether you're limited to your balcony, back garden or rambling allotment – and growing your own will not only keep you looking forward to the next harvest, but reduces stress, improves diet, counts as exercise and has been shown to help slow the onset of dementia.

It helps you top up on vitamin D too, and working directly with the earth can also bolster a positive connection with the world around you – all good for your mental wellbeing.

### WALKING THE DOG

SIMILARLY, walking the dog gets you out and about too.

Walking is particularly beneficial exercise as you age, because it's easy on the joints, but still gets the heart, lungs and muscles working.

Having a creature to care for – that cares back – has also been found to improve mental wellbeing, hence the importance and effectiveness of animal assisted therapy in hospitals and nursing homes.

### SWIMMING

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### TEAM SPORTS

EVEN better, join a team – be it netball, football, cricket or any other sports you might be interested in. Staying active and social are key to living a long, happy and fulfilled life.

Loneliness can be incredibly debilitating and has been found to be damaging to your long-term health – it's been suggested that isolation is a bigger killer than obesity. Team sports combat both.

### COOKING

NUMEROUS studies have shown that if you cook your own food from scratch, it's much more likely to be healthy and nutritious than if you plump for takeouts and processed microwave ready meals.

It's also cheaper, requires dexterity and boosts self-esteem, plus, if you're good at it, you will end up spending more time with friends and family, which boosts overall feelings of happiness and wellbeing. Although, the odd takeaway won't kill you either!

### PLAYING AN INSTRUMENT

RAISE your IQ and brain function almost instantaneously by taking up an instrument – it's never too late to learn.

It will help hone your fine motor skills to boot – and will impress your friends.

Once you feel confident, you could even sign up to an orchestra which will tick the "staying social" box, too.