

Toothache

What is a toothache?

A toothache is pain in or around a tooth.

What is the cause?

Possible causes of a toothache are:

- An infected tooth or gum
- Irritation of a tooth nerve by decay
- Problem with your sinuses or jaw
- A fracture or crack in a tooth
- A damaged filling in your tooth
- Repetitive motions such as chewing gum more than usual or grinding your teeth during sleep
- Receding gums
- A loose crown
- Any injury that may have bruised the tooth

What are the symptoms?

Tooth pain may be sharp, throbbing, or constant. Sometimes it may hurt only when you put pressure on the tooth. Most often you will feel pain in the area of the problem tooth, but sometimes you may feel pain in a different area. Cold or heat may make the pain much worse.

In some cases, you may have swelling around the tooth or get a fever or headache. Sometimes there is foul-tasting drainage from an infected tooth.

How is it diagnosed?

Your healthcare provider will examine your teeth, gums, and other areas around your mouth. If your teeth are in good condition, your provider will check your ear, throat, jaw, or sinuses to see if they may be causing the pain. In severe cases of toothache, you may have blood tests or X-rays.

How is it treated?

Because a toothache can have a variety of causes, the best way to treat your toothache is to see your dentist for treatment. Generally you can wait to go to the dentist until the next available appointment. Until then your healthcare provider or dentist may recommend pain medicine or prescribe antibiotics. Pain medicines often used for a toothache are acetaminophen or an anti-inflammatory medicine, such as ibuprofen. Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory medicines (NSAIDs), such as ibuprofen, may cause stomach bleeding and other problems. These risks increase

with age. Read the label and take as directed. Unless recommended by your healthcare provider, do not take for more than 10 days for any reason.

You can also rinse your mouth 3 to 4 times a day with warm saltwater. This may help relieve pain and swelling.

If you have significant swelling or fever, you may need an emergency dental visit.

If a tooth is infected, proper treatment is important to prevent spread of the infection to other parts of the face, skull, or possibly even the bloodstream.

How can I help prevent toothache?

The best way to prevent a toothache is to prevent damage to your teeth by:

- Brushing after every meal with a fluoride toothpaste
- Flossing to remove food particles between the teeth and to stimulate healthy gums
- Getting dental care as often as your dentist recommends, usually every 6 months.

The most important times for regular dental checks are during childhood and middle age and later. Regular dental checkups are especially important for older adults. During and after middle age, gum disease may start to cause dental problems. Also, many medicines can dry out the mouth and speed up decay.

Chewing gum containing Xylitol can reduce the amount of bacteria in your mouth, increase the amount of saliva, and help to clean off the tooth surfaces.

A healthy diet is the cornerstone of dental health. A diet rich in fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains is healthy for teeth and gums. Avoid foods made with refined sugars, such as sweets and white bread, and sweet, sticky foods, such as dried fruits, which stick on the teeth and can cause decay. Foods such as raw apples and popcorn help clean the teeth and make good snacks.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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