

A TOOL TO FACILITATE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT SENSITIVITY: SENSDODYNE CLINICAL REPAIR

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Prof Asimakopoulou is a paid consultant to Haleon for this opinion piece.

Could a new toothpaste provide a springboard to encouraging patients to talk about their sensitive teeth?

In this article, Professor Koula Asimakopoulou considers the reasons why patients with dentine hypersensitivity may be reluctant to mention it to their dental professionals. She considers the role of a new specialist toothpaste with a distinctive mode of action in opening the discussion, aiding compliance and therefore reducing sensitivity pain.

Read on to learn more.

“
I DON'T MENTION SENSITIVITY TO MY DENTIST BECAUSE I DON'T THINK HE CAN DO ANYTHING ABOUT IT
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I DON'T WANT THE DENTIST TO WASTE TIME ON SENSITIVITY, THEY HAVE MORE IMPORTANT JOBS TO DO LIKE SCREEN FOR DECAY AND ORAL CANCER
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“
I HAVE TRIED SO MANY OF THESE SENSITIVITY TOOTHPASTES...
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“
IT'S A SHORT, SHARP PAIN, IT IS NOT A BIG DEAL AND I DON'T WANT THE DENTIST TO THINK I AM A WUSS
”

These are some of the thoughts and feelings that patients with sensitivity have expressed, when talking to us as part of research work^{1,2} we have undertaken to try and understand how people with dentine hypersensitivity handle their sensitivity and why they may be reluctant to mention it to their dentist when they visit.

Although it is a constant nuisance there is a reluctance to mention to dentists

Sensitivity is seen as a constant nuisance – constant because when they eat hot or cold food, or they try and have a conversation in the cold, the pain comes in, quickly and sharply. **Sensitivity is also seen as inescapable** – patients were particularly vocal when we talked to them, about their belief that dentists can do very little, if anything at all, to help them. They spoke at length about dentists recommending “just a toothpaste” that “once you stop using it, the pain returns”. Sensitivity therefore is a condition according to patients, that is there, is impactful, but it is not the sort of issue dental teams can help them effectively with. And at the same time, this inescapable, constant nuisance, was seen as not worthy of the dental team’s time and attention.

Patients spoke in great detail about their feelings of embarrassment talking to their dentist about sensitivity, seeing it as pain that was not quite worthy of professional help. They explained how once in the dental chair, they were motivated to let the dentist ‘get on with the job’ of looking for important disease, like decay and oral cancer rather than “waste the dentist’s time” talking about sensitivity; those patients affected by dental anxiety (over 50% of all adults according to the latest Adult Oral Health Survey in England³) also spoke of the need to end the consultation as quickly as possible rather than spend longer than absolutely necessary in an environment that caused them to feel anxious. **So, sensitivity is this unspoken condition that causes pain, impacts patients' Quality of Life, interferes with daily life and yet, patients feel unwilling or unable to discuss with dental teams.**

At the same time, the same patients tell us that if a dentist were to discuss sensitivity with them, or offer a solution that was effective in the long-term, they would see that dentist as "truly patient-centred", a "good dentist", and "someone who cares". They speak of using sensitivity toothpaste periodically, and when their sensitivity pain is dealt with, they return to their usual toothpaste -having expected their sensitivity to have been dealt with once and for all. **Dentists we spoke to, spoke extensively of the difficulty getting the message across to patients that sensitivity toothpaste is not a short-term fix- that they need to use it continuously for their sensitivity to be kept at bay.**

The opportunity to relieve sensitivity pain through continued twice daily brushing with a specialist treatment

Haleon offer Sensodyne Clinical Repair toothpaste, positioned as a fluoridated daily use treatment for sensitivity that also cleans effectively and tastes very refreshing. **Clinical Repair should be easier to recommend to patients as the specialist treatment they have told us they have been hoping for. It opens up the conversation for the dental team to explain to patients that the product is a specialist treatment "that actually repairs teeth by forming a protective layer over the sensitive areas of the teeth".** The key in this communication is that the patient is given an understanding of the process through which the toothpaste works, therefore helping them realise that continuous use is important. It is therefore important that the product is presented as the effective sensitivity treatment that it is, rather than yet another toothpaste and that its effectiveness relies on continuous application so that the protective layer can be applied. This is an important addition; we know that patients stop using sensitivity toothpaste once their sensitivity has resolved, claiming that they had not been told that continuous use rests behind the product's continuous protection from sensitivity. Giving them an explanation of how the toothpaste works, will support them with this understanding.

The above should resonate both with patients who are highly troubled by sensitivity and those who are aware of it but report not being impacted hugely by the condition. A specialist treatment is likely to appeal to those most bothered by sensitivity. Equally, a treatment that deals with the problem without the patient having to resort to complex methods, should appeal to those who are not troubled by sensitivity that much.

A few minutes conversation that could make a big difference

The research with dental teams revealed that conversations were easy to have and they mentioned how sensitivity conversations were really straightforward, quick and easy. As such, we are told, conversations where sensitivity treatments are recommended are seen by dental teams as "a quick win". Because Sensodyne Clinical Repair toothpaste presents patients with a straight forward solution to a problem that has real impacts for their day to day life, and because the conversation is simple to have, quick, and non-controversial, we hope dental teams to be able to engage in such talk routinely. **Spending a few minutes at the start of the consultation to check on sensitivity and offer a solution to patients, is likely to set the consultation scene easily and efficiently.** Patients tell us that they see dentists who do have these conversations, are person-centred, caring, trustworthy and respectful of their patients. **Sensodyne Clinical Repair should prove a tool in dental teams' toolkit to facilitate having conversations about sensitivity.**



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