

Everything you need to know about toothache

Many of us have suffered from a toothache in the past and most often it is a sign that there is something wrong with your tooth or gums. Occasionally however, toothache can be a referred pain. This is where the pain is being caused by a problem somewhere else in the body.

Toothaches should never be ignored or left untreated. Even though they are usually not life-threatening, there are some cases where they can be signs of a serious condition that requires immediate medical treatment.

What are the symptoms of a toothache?

Toothache can range from mild to severe. The pain may be persistent or intermittent. Symptoms may include:

- Throbbing pain or swelling in or around your tooth or gum
- Bleeding from your tooth or gums
- Swelling of your jaw and face
- Sharp pain when you touch your tooth or bite down
- Painful sensation in your tooth when consuming hot or cold food and drinks
- Fever
- Burning or shock like pain (Uncommon)

What are the common causes of toothache?

The most common causes of toothache are:

- Tooth decay (hole in the tooth)
- Cracked tooth
- Loose filling
- Broken filling
- Inflammation of the pulp inside your tooth
- Receding gums
- Dental abscess

Other causes of toothache which are caused by referred pain are:

- Sinus infection
- Mouth ulcer
- Jaw problems

What are the less common causes of toothache?

Heart disease and lung cancer can also cause toothaches. This is due to the location of the vagus nerve which runs from your brain to different organs in the body including the heart and lung. It also passes through your jaw. In some cases a toothache may be a warning sign of a heart attack.

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Other rare conditions that can also cause referred pain to your skull, face and teeth include [trigeminal neuralgia](#) and [occipital neuralgia](#). These are painful neurological conditions that cause your trigeminal and occipital nerves to become irritated or inflamed.

Treating toothache

Treatment of a toothache will depend on the cause of the pain or swelling. The dentist may take X-Rays and perform a physical examination to determine the cause of the pain. It may include a [filling](#), [root canal therapy](#) or a [crown](#), if the pain is caused by a dental cavity (hole in the tooth). They may prescribe pain relief or antibiotics to treat an infection.

If the dentist is uncertain of the cause of the toothache they may refer you to a doctor for diagnosis and treatment. If pain is caused by sinusitis or a sinus infection, your doctor may treat this with decongestants and/or antibiotics. If the cause is trigeminal, occipital neuralgia, heart or lung disease the dentist may refer you to a doctor for further investigation.

If your dentist suspects that you are having a heart attack they will send you immediately to the emergency department.

When a toothache is an emergency

If you have any of the following symptoms along with a toothache it is important to seek emergency treatment:

- Swelling in your jaw or face (this may be a sign that an infection is spreading)
- Fever Above 38 degrees celsius (also a sign of infection)
- Chest pain, shortness of breath, lightheadedness or other signs of a heart attack
- Wheezing, a cough that won't go away or coughing up blood
- Trouble breathing and swallowing (this may be a sign of lung cancer)

How to prevent toothache

Ensure that you brush your teeth after every meal using a fluoride toothpaste. Ensure that you also floss regularly and if your mouth is sore use a soft toothbrush. As well as brushing and flossing regularly:

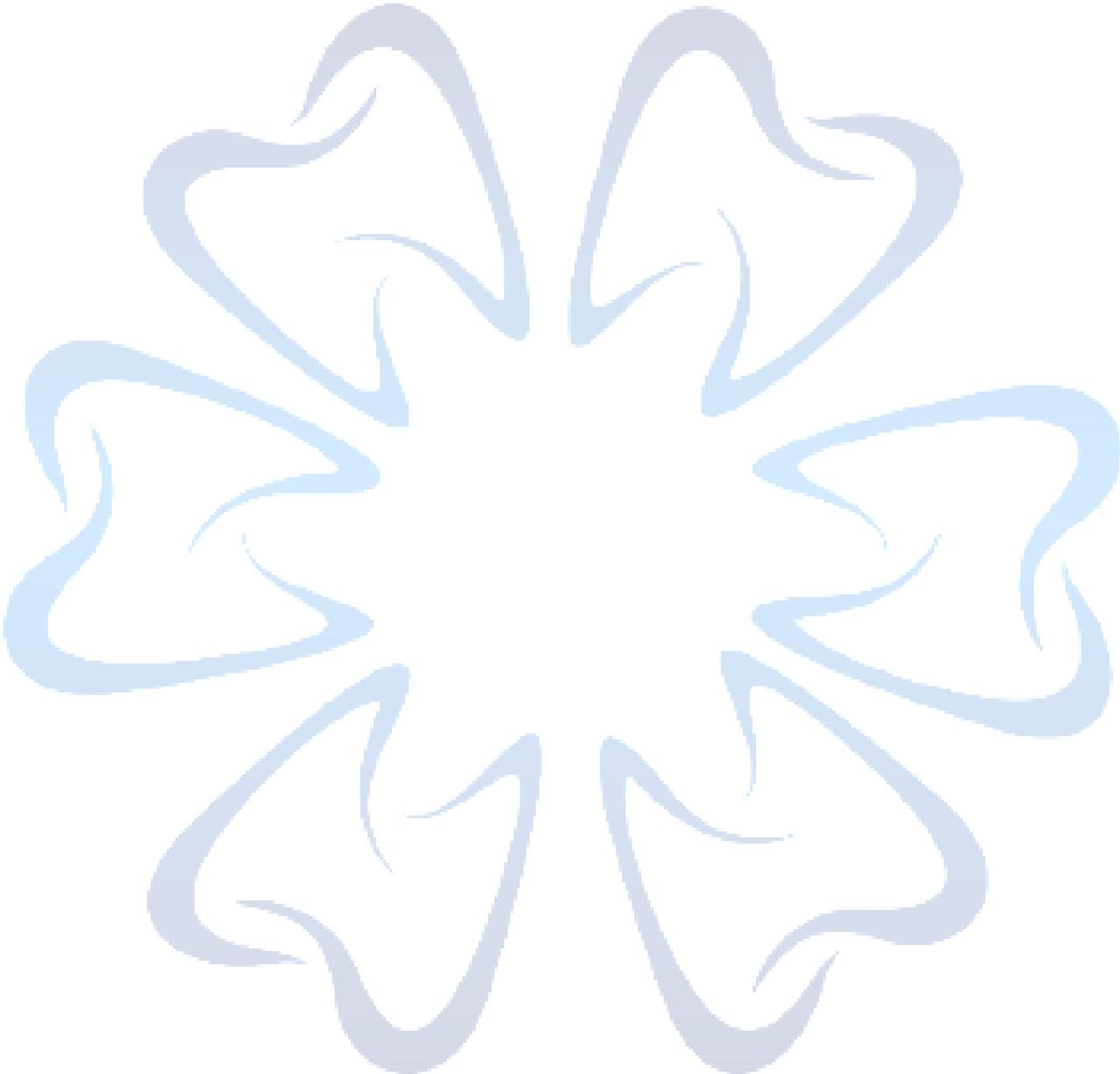
- Avoid sugary and fatty foods
- Drink water containing fluoride
- Avoid smoking
- Eat a balanced healthy diet

Sources

Healthdirect.com.au

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