



Managing toothache in the pharmacy

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Introduction

A toothache, also called odontalgia, is pain that occurs in or around a tooth. Enamel is the hard, outer layer of a tooth and covers a softer inner layer called dentine. Dentine is the tooth's sensitive layer with several microscopic tubes that originate from the centre of the tooth. The pulp chamber at the centre of the tooth contains pulp that is made up of blood vessels and nerves. Damage that reaches the dentine can cause discomfort, but as the damage approaches the centre it is more likely to cause pain, as there is less structure to insulate and protect the pulp.

Signs and symptoms of a toothache

The following signs and symptoms may indicate a tooth problem:

- Pain with biting or chewing
- Pain on exposure to cold or warm air or liquids
- Swelling of the cheek or gums near the tooth
- Bleeding or discharge from around a tooth or gums
- Constant dull pain around the tooth
- Constant throbbing pain around the tooth
- Bad taste or odour in the mouth
- Fever

It is not unusual to feel mild pain from pressure, heat or cold exposure, but if the pain persists for more than 15 seconds after exposure has stopped, it may be an indication that there is a more serious problem. Tapping of the affected tooth may make the pain worse and is a method often used by a dental practitioner to identify the problematic tooth that may appear

otherwise normal. If there is severe inflammation, pain may also radiate to the cheek, ear or jaw.

Causes of toothache

Toothache is a result of inflammation of the pulp in the centre of the tooth. Some of the most common causes of toothache include:

- Tooth decay or dental cavities
- Tooth abscess or infection
- Cracked tooth or fracture
- Damaged or broken fillings or crowns
- Gingivitis (inflamed gums) or infected gums
- Teeth grinding or clenching (also called bruxism)
- New growing (erupting) teeth (teething in children and growing wisdom teeth, also called third molars, in adults)
- Exposed root surfaces (when the gums no longer cover the roots of the teeth)
- Inflammation due to sinusitis can affect the upper molars and result in tooth pain or sensitivity
- Impacted wisdom teeth that cannot break through the gums or grow sideways instead of upwards

Treatment of toothache

Treatment of toothache depends on the underlying cause. Treatment of toothache in the pharmacy should be aimed at relieving pain until the patient can get to a dentist. Patients should see a dentist as soon as possible as treatment is usually easier if it can be addressed earlier.

Oral analgesics such as paracetamol or ibuprofen may be given for pain relief. Paracetamol is preferred in children, teenagers and in pregnancy. Aspirin should be avoided in children and adolescents under 16 years.

Clove oil is an essential oil that can provide temporary pain relief when applied to the affected tooth. It can be diluted with

a few drops of olive oil to reduce burning in the mouth. Rinse the mouth with warm salt water or warm water to clean the area, then place a small cotton ball soaked in the oil on the affected area for a few minutes to produce a numbing effect.

Conclusion

It is hard to ignore an aching tooth while eating or going about one's day. While bothersome, it is a way to alert patients to seek care from a dentist. Managing pain is the main objective in the pharmacy and whilst analgesic treatment provides temporary relief, it is important to refer patients to a dentist sooner rather than later to manage the underlying cause.

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