

GINGIVAL RECESSION: ITS CAUSE AND CURE

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A very common oral condition is gingival or gum recession. Many patients can tell they have a problem from experiencing sensitivity on the roots of their teeth when brushing or eating or by just looking at their gum line.

Receding gums can affect one tooth or many teeth and can be caused from anatomic variations in the bone covering the roots of the teeth, from bacterial infection of the gums and bone support, trauma to the gums, orthodontic treatment, bruxing and/or clenching of the teeth or from muscle attachments that pull at the gum line.

The treatment of some types of receding gums can begin with prevention. When brushing, use only a soft toothbrush and non-abrasive toothpastes. Strong pressure while brushing is also not recommended. Using a typical manual toothbrush and gentle small round circular motions at the gum line will sufficiently clean the teeth. If using an electric toothbrush of any type, use a very light touch in order to allow the brush to do the work for you.

If you do have a tooth with gum recession, the cause should be discovered to properly decide on the treatment indicated. It is very possible that you have simply brushed too hard in the area causing the gums to recede, exposing the root surface with associated sensitivity. Exposed root surfaces are more prone to decay and as they are softer than enamel, also more prone to damage from brushing. Treatment for this type of recession consists of using toothpaste for sensitive teeth in conjunction with changing brushing techniques. If this is not sufficient to stop the sensitivity or if a defect exists in the root surface, a small tooth colored filling can be bonded over the surface which would stop the sensitivity and protect the root from further damage. If the recession is extensive, a gum graft can be surgically placed at the site to cover the root surface and restore the anatomical contours.

At times, thin, fragile gum tissue associated with orthodontics can result in gum recession. If the recession covers multiple teeth, surgical intervention would be the best choice of treatment. At times, a potential problem can be identified prior to orthodontics and a surgical procedure could be completed

before braces were started to prevent gum recession.

Another cause of gum recession is poor occlusion (bite), or habits like bruxing and/or clenching. These habits cannot only cause TMJ problems like myofacial pain, headaches, and limitation of opening of the mouth but also a condition called abfraction. Abfraction occurs when excessive pressure is applied to the teeth and it results if the enamel at the gum line to pop off leaving exposed root surface and gum recession. Once this occurs, the treatment is similar to that of other types of recession. Once again, prevention of problems associated with bruxing and clenching should be considered. In this case, an occlusal guard should be constructed. This appliance is also called a bite splint or night guard and is usually constructed to fit over the top teeth. This guard splints the top teeth together and prevents the lower teeth from applying excessive pressure to any one upper or lower tooth. This in turn prevents the upper and lower teeth from touching during bruxing/clenching and allows the facial muscles to relax, while preventing abfraction and the possibility of fracturing a tooth which would require a crown and root canal.

Another cause of gum recession is periodontal disease which is a bacterial infection that affects the gingival tissue and the bone supporting it. Your dentist can best diagnose this condition and can inform you what treatment would be most effective.