

## Receding gums and cervical lesions

Receding gums occur when the edge of the gum tissue that surrounds the teeth wears away exposing more of the tooth and as it progresses eventually exposed the root surface. Receding gums which expose the root surfaces of teeth is a common condition in adults over the age of 40. There can be many causes of receding gums.

Receding gums may be one of the first signs of periodontitis or gum disease. A buildup of bacterial plaque can cause gingival inflammation and lead to infections that destroy gum tissue and supporting bone that hold your teeth in place. In other cases it may be caused by the wear and tear or years of aggressive tooth brushing. Most people do not realize that they have gum recession because it is a process that occurs gradually. The first sign of gum recession is usually tooth sensitivity, sometimes to cold or when you touch the area of recession or brush your teeth. You may notice a tooth looks longer than normal.

The good news is that recession can be prevented by good daily oral hygiene habits. It is important to always brush with a soft toothbrush, using mild pressure and small circular motions. Avoid hard toothbrush bristles and long horizontal brush strokes with excessive pressure on your toothbrush. It can also be beneficial to avoid whitening toothpaste which uses abrasive particles as part of the whitening process. If recession has occurred without loss of the underlying tooth it may be possible to graft tissue to cover a portion of the exposed root surface and to reinforce the fragile, receding gum tissue to protect from further recession. The sensitivity which occurs from recession can sometimes be resolved with the placement of a desensitizer on the root surface by your dentist.

If the recession is accompanied by loss of the underlying tooth structure additional treatment may be required. With loss of underlying tooth structure a notch can be felt at the top of the tooth, just below the gum line. This is referred to as a cervical lesion. These lesions can have multiple causes including occlusal stress, toothbrush/toothpaste abrasion, and chemical erosion.

When the cervical lesion is caused by occlusal forces it is referred to as abfraction. When we clench or grind our teeth they are exposed to lateral or oblique forces which cause the teeth to bend slightly near the edge where the tooth meets the root near to gum tissue. This flexion creates micro-fractures of thin enamel and subsequent exposure of the underlying dentin, which is then susceptible to mechanical and/or chemical wear. Brushing with a hard toothbrush, abrasive toothpaste and excessive forces also lead to cervical lesions. Studies have shown that the abrasive properties in toothpaste can wear away enamel at the cervical third and the underlying dentin and root surface. These lesions can become quite a large notch in the tooth. Treatment of these cervical lesions includes filling the notch with a composite or white filling material.

In addition to treating the defect with a filling material or covering the receding area with a graft, prevention is important. If you grind or clench your teeth your dentist should fabricate an occlusal guard to wear at night. This will prevent wear and dissipate the forces generated through clenching and grinding. It is important to always use a soft tooth brush, a non-abrasive toothbrush with gentle pressure.

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