

Long in the Tooth?

Have you noticed that your gums recede? That "long in the tooth" look is actually tooth root exposure. There are basically two parts of the tooth; the crown which has enamel on it, and the root which is composed of softer dentin. The root is decidedly yellower or browner than the white enamel. It's also a lot softer.

Roots sometimes become exposed in the middle of life and sometimes later in life. Not only is root exposure unsightly, but it more easily wears away. You can feel it. Go ahead! Put your fingernail on your tooth, and if you have an exposed root, feel what the root feels like. Chances are you will feel a depression and your fingernail will catch on that depression. The deeper the wear, the more your tooth is susceptible to sensitivity, even fracture.

The reason that root exposure occurs is that the gum and bone surrounding the tooth are too thin to begin with. You are born with teeth that are too wide for the surrounding gum and bone. This "stretches" the already thin gum tissue. Over time, we just don't stretch as easily as we used to. The result – the stretched gum tissue goes away, and the gums recede.

What's the solution? Make your gum and bone thicker. There are surgical procedures that do just that; rebuilds the bone that was never there; restores the gum tissue that was lost and covers the exposed root.

What is the result? The result is greater support for the tooth; a tooth that is now better supported by gum tissue and better supported by bone tissue. More importantly, the root is now covered with gum tissue and will stop wearing away.

This is a procedure that is done by a periodontist. If you have root exposure, the periodontist could be your best friend.

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