

Thin Gums Lead to Sensitive Teeth

When you eat ice cream, do your teeth feel so sensitive that you dare not take another bite?

Gum recession can become a gradually worsening problem as we get older. It occurs because the underlying gum tissue on the bone may be thin and have a poor blood supply.

So while our gum tissue stretched over our teeth when we were younger, the tissues get thinner and thinner as we get older and gradually go away, producing exposure of the root surface.

This can present a number of problems.

First, the root exposure gives you that "long in the tooth" look. Second, the root exposure often produces tooth sensitivity.

Very simply, the top part of our tooth is covered with enamel. Enamel provides a nice thermal layer, like a blanket. But the root doesn't have enamel, so when we eat cold or sweet things, we feel it right into our roots and sometimes right into our bone.

Third, because the root surface is not covered by tough, hard enamel, it tends to wear away.

You can feel that yourself if you have recession. Put your fingernail on your root surface (if it isn't too sensitive) and you may feel your root actually is gouged. And the deeper the gouge, the more sensitive the tooth may be.

And, of course, the deeper the gouge, the weaker the tooth may be.

Yes, I have seen teeth that have been gouged so deeply that the tooth eventually broke.

What can be done about that? There is a procedure called soft-tissue grafting. Soft tissue is placed underneath your thin gum tissue to make it thicker. Thicker gum tissue has a better blood supply. And if your tissue is thicker, it is more likely to cover your exposed roots.

For years we took soft-tissue grafts from the roof of the mouth, but we don't have to do that as much anymore. There are specific tissues that come from a tissue bank, perfectly safe, that can be used to replace your missing gum tissue.

The second change is that we can extract growth factors from a small amount of your blood to speed healing.

Long in the tooth? It can be corrected, improving sensitivity and your smile.

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