

Receding Gums

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Gums that recede to expose the root surfaces of teeth is a common condition in adults over the age of 40. Many consider it to be just a sign of aging, and in some cases it is essentially that – often the result of wear and tear or years of aggressive tooth brushing. However, sometimes receding gums can be a sign of something more.

In many cases, receding gums are caused by periodontal disease (gum disease). Three out of four adults have some form of it, and in most cases, it doesn't cause any pain and goes unnoticed.

Common in adults, gum disease starts when bacteria containing plaque builds up on the teeth and gums. When the plaque is not removed daily, it produces toxins that irritate and inflame the gums. Eventually the inflammatory process destroys the gum tissues, causing them to separate from the tooth and form spaces called pockets. The pockets hold more bacteria, which only compounds the problem.

In the early stages, gum disease (gingivitis), marked by red or swollen gums that bleed easily, is reversible and can be detected and treated by your dentist or dental hygienist during regular check-ups. As the disease progresses (periodontitis), it can destroy the bone and soft tissues that support the teeth. In advanced stages of periodontitis, teeth can become loose, fall out or have to be removed by a dentist. In fact, periodontitis is the culprit in 70 percent of tooth loss in adults over 40.

The good news is these gum conditions can be prevented by good daily oral hygiene habits. Receding gums are best prevented by brushing with a soft toothbrush, using mild-to-moderate pressure and small circular or very short back and forth motions. Avoid hard toothbrush bristles and long horizontal brush strokes with excessive pressure on your toothbrush.

If your gums have receded, it is sometimes 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. Also common to receded gums is sensitivity that results from the exposed root surface. Your CDA member dentist can apply medications in the office, and /or recommend products for you to use at home that will help reduce sensitivity of these root surfaces and help protect the now vulnerable root surface from decay.

Remember, with daily brushing and flossing and regular visits to your CDA member dentist, adults can look forward to keeping their natural teeth throughout their life.