



Periodontal

# Gum Recession Causes and Treatments



### In this brochure:

- What is gum recession?
- Gum recession can lead to tooth loss
- Possible causes of gum recession
- Treatment options to repair receding gums

### ADA Healthy Smile Tips

- Brush your teeth twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste.
- Clean between your teeth daily.
- Eat a healthy diet that limits sugary beverages and snacks.
- See your dentist regularly for prevention and treatment of oral disease.

For more information about taking care of your mouth and teeth, visit [MouthHealthy.org](http://MouthHealthy.org), the ADA's website just for patients.



*Gum grafting photos courtesy of Dr. Bernard W. Murray.*

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When your teeth are healthy, your gum tissue tightly hugs each of your teeth. But, when the gum tissue that surrounds the teeth wears away, or pulls back, exposing more of the tooth or the tooth's root, it is called **gum recession (re-SESH-un)**, or receding gums. Gum recession can happen at any age and can cause problems for your dental health.

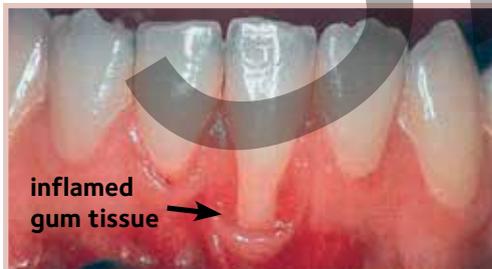
Even if you take good care of your teeth, gum recession is possible. Your dentist can help you understand what is causing your gums to recede and suggest a treatment.

Gum recession can leave the tooth root exposed, or unprotected. The root surface does not have a hard, protective covering like the top of your tooth so it may become sensitive to hot and cold. **The exposed tooth root is also more at risk for decay. In severe cases, it may lead to tooth loss.**

## Possible Causes of Gum Recession

- gum disease
- brushing your teeth too hard or using a toothbrush with hard bristles
- heavy plaque buildup
- trauma to gum tissues, such as a sports injury
- crowded or tilted teeth
- partial dentures that don't fit right
- genetics — some people are born with gums that are thin or weak
- smoking or using any kind of tobacco
- habits like picking at teeth with sharp objects
- oral jewelry that rubs against the gums

The risk of gum recession also increases with age.



Gums receding on upper and lower teeth.

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## Treatments

It is important to treat gum recession so that it doesn't get worse and cause other problems. The treatment for gum recession depends on the cause.

If gum recession is caused by brushing too hard, your dentist or hygienist can show you a better way to clean your teeth. This will not repair the existing damage, but it will prevent new damage to your gums.

If gum recession is caused by gum disease, the first step is usually a deep cleaning treatment called **scaling (SKAY-ling)** and **root planing (PLAY-ning)**. Your dentist removes plaque and tartar from your tooth and root surfaces. This helps gum tissues heal and reattach to the tooth. For many patients, this, plus excellent oral care at home and regular dental visits can help control gum disease and recession.

If gum recession is caused by partial dentures that do not fit right, your dentist can adjust or remake them for you.

If your gum recession is advanced, a gum graft may be needed. A thin piece of gum tissue is taken from another place in your mouth and attached where the gum tissue has receded. Once the graft heals, it covers the exposed tooth root and protects it from sensitivity and decay.

Gum grafts are a type of surgery that may be done around one or more teeth. Right after graft surgery, the area may be tender or sore and may swell. Most people are able to go back to their normal routines the next day. However, you may need to avoid chewing for a week or two where the surgery was done. Your dentist will talk with you about your specific healing time.



### Before gum graft

Exposed tooth roots are more at risk for cavities and sensitivity.



### After gum graft

Repaired gums now protect tooth roots.

Keep your teeth and gums healthy by brushing gently twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. Also, be sure to clean between your teeth daily with floss or another between-the-teeth cleaner. Look for products with the **American Dental Association Seal of Acceptance**. These products have been tested and proven to be both safe and effective for keeping your mouth healthy.

