

How Receding Gums Can Totally Ruin Your Teeth

Brushing too hard may do you more harm than good.

By [Emily Shiffer](#) Jun 8, 2018



When it comes to your smile, keeping your teeth free of cavities and sparkly white are often top priorities. But while your chompers may look healthy, your dental health actually starts with an often overlooked part of your mouth: your gums.

VOTE! Which is worse: going to the dentist or going to the gyno?

Dentist—the flossing part sucks!

Gyno, no question.

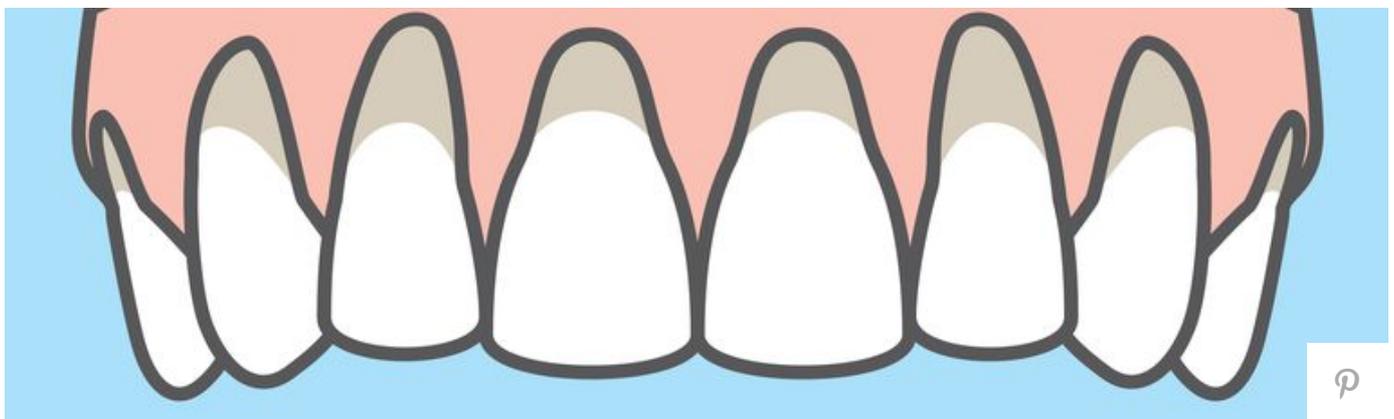
ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

“Gums are the specialized structures that surround and support the teeth, maintaining them in your bone,” says Soo-Woo Kim, DMD, program director of predoctoral periodontology at Harvard School of Dental Medicine. “Although you may have perfect teeth, if the foundation is weak and compromised, then you will not be able to maintain proper oral health.”

One common condition that should send you straight to the dentist? Receding gums—a fancy way of saying the gums around your teeth are wearing away or getting pulled back. This exposes more of the root of your tooth, making your teeth look longer.

Even though a bit of wear and tear is hard to avoid as you age, losing bits of your gums can wreak havoc on your teeth. Here’s how to tell if your gums are receding, how the condition impacts your health, and what you can do to keep your teeth healthy for life.

What do receding gums look like?



GETTY IMAGES

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

As you can imagine, having your gums wear away doesn't look or feel great. "Receding gums are most likely accompanied with thin gum tissue, and you can see and feel the discrepancy of the gum line," says Jeff C. Wang, DDS, director of predoctoral periodontics at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry. (See pictures of receding gums [here](#).)

One of the first symptoms you may notice is sensitivity, explains Silvana Barros, DDS, associate professor of periodontology at the University of North Carolina School of Dentistry, like pain during brushing or when you drink something cold. Other symptoms may also appear, including:

- Red, swollen, or tender gums or other pain in your mouth
- Bleeding while brushing, flossing, or eating hard food
- Loose, separating, or visibly longer teeth
- Pus between your gums and teeth
- Sores in your mouth
- Persistent bad breath
- Your teeth don't fit together properly when you bite
- A change in the fit of partial dentures

How do receding gums impact your health?

"Gums are the first line of defense to prevent the breakdown of the underlying bony architecture of teeth," says Vera Tang, DDS, clinical assistant professor at the NYU College of Dentistry. "The gums form a tight collar around the tooth. If plaque, bacteria, and food debris accumulate along the gum line and are not removed on a regular basis, this collar becomes inflamed and loose, and travels down the root surface of the tooth and begins to break down the bony architecture that supports teeth."

When left untreated, receding gums can lead to other not-so-fun dental problems, like gum disease (hello, gingivitis!) or even tooth loss. And get this: research shows a link between gum disease and an increased risk of [heart disease](#), potentially due to the increase of inflammation in your body, according to the [American Academy of Periodontology](#) (AAP).

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

What are the causes of receding gums?

Everyday habits that don't seem like a huge deal could actually be damaging your gums, and therefore, your teeth. Here are a few things to look out for:

XYou're brushing too hard

Going full force with your toothbrush doesn't automatically mean your teeth will be cleaner. "Especially when using a stiff toothbrush, it can hurt the gums and cause shrinkage of the gum line," says Dr. Wang.

✓Tooth tip: Dr. Barros recommends using a soft bristle toothbrush, since it will be less abrasive along your gum line. Then, adjust the way you brush. "Use just your finger tips to hold the handle, which may help lessen the amount of pressure placed on the teeth and gums," says Dr. Tang.



AMAZON

Oral-B Sensi-Soft Toothbrushes

\$4.97

[SHOP NOW](#)

XYou may already have gum disease

Research from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggests that nearly half of Americans have gum disease.

"Periodontal disease, also known as gum disease, is caused when bacteria in plaque builds up between the gums and teeth," says Dr. Tang. "When the bacteria begin to grow, the gums surrounding the tooth can become inflamed. When left untreated, this inflammation can cause the gums and supporting bone structure to deteriorate. This can lead to gum recession or even tooth loss," says Dr. Tang.

✓**Tooth tip:** “Maintaining good oral hygiene and a strong immune system are key. It is important to get regular dental exams and professional teeth cleanings (at least twice per year),” says Dr. Wang. If you’re a smoker, add this to your list of reasons to quit: smokers are twice as likely to develop gum disease.

✗**You’re eating too much sugar**

As you probably learned the hard way when you were a kid, the foods you eat can have a huge impact on your teeth. Watch out for foods that are highly acidic (soda, citrus fruits, and coffee) or full of sugar (hard candies, sports drinks, and desserts), since they can harm the structure of your teeth and irritate your gums.

✓**Tooth tip:** Cut the junk and watch your sugar intake to reduce your risk of excess plaque. The American Dental Association recommends limiting your sugar intake to less than 10 percent of your total daily calories, which is consistent with the U.S. Dietary Guidelines. So if you eat 1,500 calories per day, 150 or less should come from sugar. That caps you at roughly 37 grams.

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

You can also eat more of the *right* foods, like green tea (thanks to its protective antioxidants), fiber-rich foods like oats, as well as plenty of fruits and vegetables, recommends Dr. Wang. Eating more healthy fats, especially the omega-3 fatty acids found in fatty fish, seems to positively affect your teeth as well, according to one 2016 review of research.

✗**You might be grinding your teeth at night**

Grinding your teeth can create “micro-movement” in your mouth, which can damage your tooth ligaments and surrounding gums, says Dr. Wang.

✓**Tooth tip:** Because grinding typically happens as you sleep (and you might be totally unaware you’re doing it) wearing a customized night guard to keep your teeth apart will help keep the habit under control, says Dr. Kim. Talk to your dentist if you think you might be grinding at night, as he or she can fit you with one properly.

✗**Genetics could play a role**

“If your parents have gum disease or severe gum recession, you may have a higher chance of developing it as well. Those who have thinner tissue are also prone for more gum recession,” says Dr. Wang.

✓**Tooth tip:** Ask your parents about their dental health. Making your dentist aware of any issues can help identify preventive treatments you may need.

How to prevent receding gums before it begins



GETTY IMAGES

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

The best thing you can do is try to keep your gums as healthy as you can *before* any problems pop up, because once your gums are gone, they don't just come back on their own. Typically, you'll just have to take the preventive measures above to keep things from getting worse, but if you experience gum disease or your dentist thinks you

might lose a tooth, a periodontist might require surgery to restore the missing tissue with a gum graft.

Here are a few more habits that should be a part of your oral care routine to prevent your gums from receding.

MORE ABOUT YOUR TEETH



8 Teeth-Whitening Products That Actually Work



12 Things Your Dentist Knows About Your Health

Stop skipping the floss. “Flossing at least once a day helps remove food particles and plaque between teeth and along the gum line that your toothbrush can’t quite reach,” says Dr. Tang.

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW

Stay on top of cleanings. See your dentist every 6 months. If you notice any redness, swelling, or deterioration around your gums, you should see a pro before the problem gets worse, says Dr. Wang.

Know your risk. More than 70 percent of Americans over the age of 65 have gum disease, says the AAP. If you fall into that group *and* you smoke, speak with your dentist about what your oral care routine should look like.

He or she will be able to take a closer look at your teeth, gums, bite, and bone structure to determine if any of the risk factors above are an issue as well. “Identifying symptoms of gum disease early is key to protecting your teeth and gums,” says Dr. Tang.

Watch Next

CPR Saved My Life

Read Next

4 SURPRISING WAYS STRESS CAN RUIN YOUR HAIR

6 EVERYDAY MISTAKES THAT ARE YELLOWING YOUR TEETH

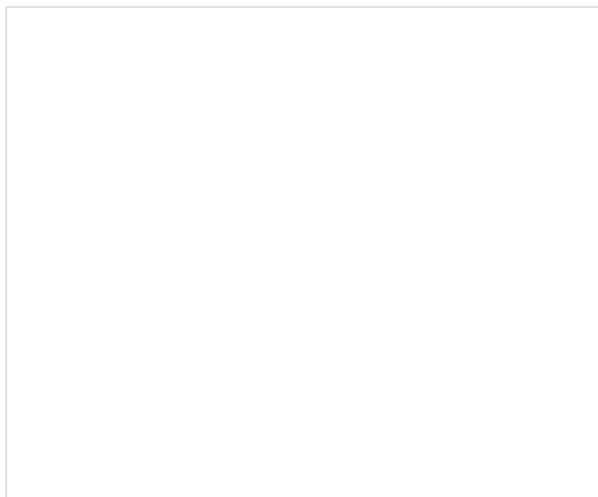
MORE FROM

Health

Can Using a Weighted Blanket Ease Anxiety?

Keto Diet Benefits for Diabetes

ADVERTISEMENT - CONTINUE READING BELOW



What Is Toxic Shock Syndrome?

Mom's Photo Shows Dangers of Sliding with Kids

6 Insoles That May Ease Your Heel Pain

Sea Lice Invade Florida Beaches

You Could Have PTSD Symptoms and Not Even Know It

How to Get Rid of a Migraine ASAP

7 Tick-Borne Diseases That Are on the Rise

FDA Approves Marijuana-Based Drug

[HEALTH](#)

[WHAT IS LYME DISEASE?](#)

[THIS LIFE-THREATENING CONDITION IS ON THE RISE](#)

[THIS UTERINE CONDITION AFFECTS UP TO 70% OF WOMEN](#)

[YOU COULD HAVE PTSD SYMPTOMS AND NOT EVEN KNOW IT](#)

[WHAT IS PSORIASIS?](#)

[9 SIGNS OF BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER](#)



[Newsletter](#)

[Give A Gift](#)

[Digital Editions](#)

[Subscribe](#)

[Advertise Online](#)

[Customer Service](#)

[Press Room](#)

[Being Green](#)

[Community Guidelines](#)

[Media Kit](#)

[Other Hearst Subscriptions](#)

A Part of Hearst Digital Media

Prevention participates in various affiliate marketing programs, which means we may get paid commissions on editorially chosen products purchased through our links to retailer sites.

©2018 Hearst Communications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

[Updated Privacy Notice](#)

[Your California Privacy Rights](#)

[Interest-Based Ads](#)

[Updated Terms of Use](#)

[Site Map](#)