



Receding gums

Question

<p>Dear Alice,</p>

<p>My gums are receding. I don't know why or what to do. I'm 25, but even my 18 year old sister has the same problem. Is there anything we can do or should we just resign ourselves to accepting food stuck in our gums and other problems? By the way, aside from my gums, my teeth are fine. I've never had cavities, any dental drilling or surgery, or anything else. I know this isn't a major problem, but thanks for reading it anyway.</p>

<p>Signed,</p>

<p>It's your teeth or your gums...</p>

Answer

<p>Dear It's your teeth or your gums...,</p>

<p>Receding gums are typically a sign of periodontal disease, which is common among adults (and more men than women) in the United States. The major culprit in this preventable disease is dental plaque, a sticky substance composed of millions of bacteria that accumulate around and between teeth. If not removed effectively by daily brushing and flossing, plaque hardens into tartar, which can only be removed during a professional dental cleaning. Although your current dental routine is keeping cavities at bay, plenty of people experience gum disease while remaining cavity-free. In fact, plenty of folks have gum disease and don't even know it. Above and beyond cosmetic reasons, gum disease has also been linked to heart disease, trouble with blood sugar management, and risk for pre-term, low weight babies (in pregnant women) – so it's good that you're taking gum health seriously. You also ask whether you and sister can do something about this condition; in addition to optimizing your dental care routine, you may want to talk to your dentist and/or health care provider about addressing any risk factors that may put you and your sibling at a higher risk for gum disease.</p>

<p>There are actually two forms of periodontal disease: gingivitis is a mild form of periodontal disease that can make your gums swollen and bleed easily. It can typically be managed by regular dental care. However, if not managed effectively, it can develop into periodontitis; a more serious condition where your gums start to pull away from your teeth and create pockets. These pockets between the teeth and gums harbor bacterial infections that can lead to serious damage to your gums and may even result in tooth loss.</p>



<p>Do-it-yourself options are considered the first resort for managing your symptoms and preventing long-term disease, which include:</p>



<a href="http://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/why-do-i-have-brush-m... your teeth for at least two minutes twice a day. Make sure to use a soft-bristle brush and use fluoride toothpaste. The American Dental Association also recommends replacing your brushes every three to four months to ensure you're brush is getting the job done effectively.

Using dental floss regularly. Not flossing regularly or not sure you're doing it right? Read How to floss? for more information.

Making regular visits to your dentist every six to twelve months for check-ups and professional cleanings.

<p>Though regular dental care can typically stave off any serious issues, there are some folks that run a higher risk for gum disease than others. It's a good idea to be aware of certain factors that may increase the chances for gum disease:</p>



Tobacco use: Smoking has been linked to a high risk of developing gum disease and also has been shown to lower the chances of treating the disease successfully.

Hormone fluctuations (in women): Hormonal fluctuations and changes that occur in women's lifetime (e.g., menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause) can alter the conditions in her mouth that make her more susceptible to gum disease.

Crooked teeth: Having crooked teeth may make it harder to effectively clean at home, thus putting you at a higher risk of gum disease.

Certain medical conditions and treatments: Those with diabetes and AIDS are at a higher risk for gum disease. The treatments for AIDS and some cancers may also increase the risk for the disease as well.

Medications that cause dry mouth: Because saliva acts as a protective agent and makes the mouth less susceptible to infections, any medications that reduce saliva production may increase your risk.

Genetic predisposition: You may have inherited an increased risk for developing gum disease.

<p class="rteindent1">List adapted from National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research.</p>



<p>Taking action to achieve optimal at-home dental care, seeing your dentist regularly, and addressing any factors that may increase the likelihood for gum disease can help to maintain your oral health and prevent further gum recession. If your gums have receded to a point where they cause serious pain or other problems, your dentist can help you decide whether or not additional treatment may be warranted (including deep cleaning techniques, medications, or surgery).</p>



<p>Best of luck getting your oral hygiene regimen going!</p>#13;

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