



Skin Grafting for Receding Gums

Gum recession can be caused by overzealous brushing, an unbalanced bite, or periodontal disease. It results in exposure of the roots of the teeth making them look too long. It can also cause unsightly spaces to appear between the teeth. In addition to the loss of esthetics, exposed roots are often sensitive to hot, cold or sweets. Because the roots are not protected by the hard enamel that covers the crowns of our teeth they are much more susceptible to decay.

The gum tissue that normally surrounds our teeth is quite tough and forms a seal around each tooth to prevent bacteria and infection from entering the bone. If gum recession progresses too far the seal will be broken and tooth loss can result.

Prior to treating recession, it is important to determine the cause of the problem. Once the causative factors are controlled, grafting can be done to replace the lost tissue and help prevent further gum recession.

There are two ways to surgically repair receding gums. One method uses tissue from another part of the patient's mouth and the other uses processed donor tissue called Alloderm.

Traditionally the way we repaired receded gums was to take a thin piece of tissue from the palate and transplant it to cover the exposed roots. Because it is your own tissue, there is no danger of rejection. However, there are a few disadvantages to this method.

The colour of the grafted tissue is often different from the surrounding gums and thus has the appearance of a patch. This can be a problem when the graft is done in the anterior areas where it may be visible to others when you smile.

A second disadvantage is that it requires two separate surgical sites. The donor site typically takes several weeks to heal and is often more tender than the recipient site.

Finally the amount of grafting that can be done is limited by the amount of available tissue at the donor site. We can only take so much tissue from the palate at any one session and this can be an issue if there are numerous areas of recession that need correction.

Alloderm is specially engineered donor skin that was originally developed for treating burn patients and has also been used quite extensively in other forms of plastic surgery.

Alloderm is specially engineered donor skin used in plastic surgery.

Today it is commonly used in dentistry for gum grafting.

Alloderm starts out as normal human skin which is harvested from carefully screened cadavers, but is processed to remove the cells and any components that could cause disease transmission or rejection. It serves as a matrix on which your own skin (or gum) tissue grows and reforms. It usually provides excellent colour match and does not require a second surgical site. We can also treat larger areas at any one time because we are not limited by the amount of available donor tissue.

If you have receded gums and are concerned about root decay, sensitivity or a more esthetically pleasing smile talk to your dentist about the benefits of gum grafting.

Yours for better dental health,

Rae Dorion, DDS

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