

TOOTHFULLY *speaking*



IS IT POSSIBLE TO “OVERBRUSH” YOUR TEETH?

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Brushing regularly is considered vital for healthy teeth and gums, but it is possible to overdo a good thing. This “toothbrush abrasion” often leads to gingival recession and tooth sensitivity, by scrubbing away your enamel and exposing the sensitive dentinal root area at the neck of the tooth. Receding gums also lead to further problems, such as periodontal disease and root caries, which are difficult and unsightly to fix with white fillings and occasionally reaches the root canal; you can even lose the tooth. The *Wall Street Journal* estimates that 10 to 20 percent of the population have damaged their teeth or gums from overbrushing.

It is the diligent person that is most at risk for tooth or gum damage from overbrushing; especially if you use a medium or hard-bristled toothbrush. Additional factors, such as genetic predisposition to receding gums, clenching or grinding your teeth, or having had your teeth straightened with braces, can increase your risk for damage from overbrushing.

Brushing vigorously isn't necessary to remove plaque. Plaque is soft enough to remove with a cotton swab but it's hard to access the whole tooth with a cotton swab. Good brushing technique is what is required for plaque removal, not aggressive brushing, and that takes time to achieve.

We dentists recommend that you brush your teeth for two to three minutes to get the most thorough cleaning. Use a soft or ultrasoft-bristled toothbrush; place the head of your toothbrush with the tips of the bristles at a 45-degree-angle to the gumline when brushing. Don't saw back and forth across the teeth with your toothbrush but rather apply just enough pressure to feel the bristles against the gums. If you are squashing the bristles, you're brushing too hard. Sweep “in a curling action” by rotating your wrist, angling the bristles towards the biting surface of your teeth and then move to the next tooth.

Changing brushing habits can usually stop the problem from getting worse. But if the gums have been brushed away, it is still possible to do some gingival grafting to resurrect the gums into what was originally there...new gum tissue. Note that the goal of grafting is to thicken the tissues to prevent future recession and the earlier you treat the recession, the better chance of covering the tooth root as well.

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