



CROWN LENGTHENING AND IMPLANTS AS AN ALTERNATIVE

When a tooth has a cavity above the gumline, it is simple to repair because it is readily accessible. (picture A).



However, when the cavity is located too close to the gum and bone, it is a problem for multiple reasons (pictures B & C) (C is a close-up of the affected area in B):

- Accessibility is more difficult, which can affect the quality of the final restoration (whether it is a filling or a crown).
- It is more difficult to keep the tooth and materials dry, which is critical.
- Impingement on the underlying bone will cause migration of the bone away from the filling or crown margin. This is a biological phenomenon, because the body wants to keep the bone 2 to 3 millimeters away from the edge of a restoration.



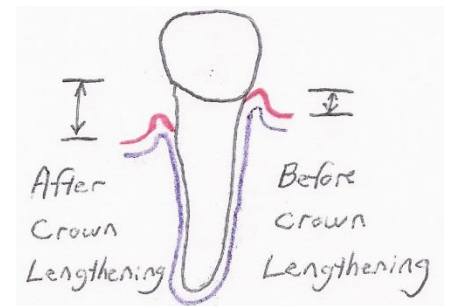
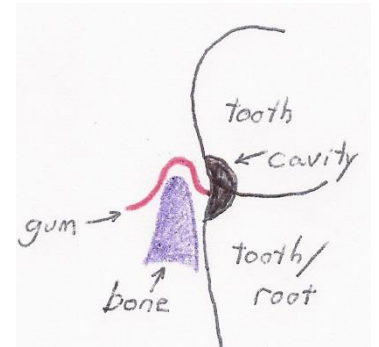
In order to prevent the bone and gum irritation, a procedure called “crown lengthening” is necessary. The gum and bone are lowered to a point that the restorative procedures (fillings and crowns) can be accomplished.

Advantages of this procedure include:

- More accurate restorations can be placed than without the procedure.
- The tooth has a greater long-term success than without the procedure.

Disadvantages of this procedure include:

- A greater chance of root decay, because the root is not protected by enamel like the upper portion of the tooth.
- A greater chance of developing tooth sensitivity in this tooth AND adjacent teeth to hot & cold, again because the root is not protected by the enamel. (A root canal will solve this problem).
- A decrease in bone height around the tooth, as well as around adjacent teeth (picture D).
- An unesthetic result, should the procedure be performed in the front of the mouth.
- A greater chance of trapping food between teeth, due to an increase in space (since the gum and bone are now at a lower height).
- A greater expense, since another procedure is necessary.



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Alternatives to crown lengthening include:

- Leaving the situation as-is, understanding: 1) the gum may be constantly irritated and bleed, along with possible pain or discomfort, 2) any crowns or fillings may fail in a shorter timeframe than normal, and 3) the tooth may require extraction at some point due to these complications.
- Extraction of the tooth and the placement of an implant. Advantages of this procedure (as compared to the crown lengthening) include: 1) preservation of bone height, 2) elimination of sensitivity, 3) elimination of decay, 4) preservation of esthetics, 5) greater long-term success. Disadvantages include: 1) the loss of the tooth, and 2) the possibility of food entrapment.

Although the crown lengthening procedure will cost less in the short-term versus a dental implant, the dental implant generally has a better long-term success rate. However, this can definitely be case-dependent.