Gingival Enlargement

Author: James K. Burnham DDS, MS

Gingival enlargement or medication-induced gingival enlargement is a common finding in dental patients. Many different medications lead to this unwanted side effect. It can create an unfavorable dental situation that leads to periodontal disease progression by trapping periodontal pathogens beneath the tissues and further contributing to the enlargement problem.

The above photograph is a typical example of how gingival enlargement might present clinically. This particular patient had been taking amlodipine for the last few years prior to presenting to our office. Note the enlarged, thickened, and inflamed tissues around the teeth. Minimal plaque and calculus may be present, as in this case, despite the enlarged tissues. These patients often have good oral hygiene habits/efforts, but still develop these issues. The exact mechanism of the enlargement is still unknown.

Medications associated with gingival enlargement:

Anti-antihypertensive medications: Nifedipine, Diltiazem, Amlodipine, Felodipine, Verapamil

Anti-convulsant medications: Phenytoin, Phenobarbital, Lamotrigine, Vigabatrin, Ethosuximide, Topiramate, Primidone

Immunosuppressant medications: Cyclosporine

Patients that take any of the above medications are certainly susceptible to developing gingival enlargement.

There are many different treatment choices for patients with gingival enlargement, including:

1. Surgical resection (gingival tissue as well as osseous tissues if necessary)
2. Laser resection (gingival tissue as well as osseous tissues if necessary)
3. Oral hygiene instruction to improve their efforts and effectiveness
4. Consultation with the patient's physician for possible medication substitution

Recognizing and differentiating medication-induced gingival enlargement from inflammatory-induced gingival enlargement is critical as this will lead to proper and timely treatment.