

## Are dental problems hereditary?

### Dentist examines dental problems "in the family"

#### fast Facts

##### What is hereditary in your mouth?

- FAMILY GAPS
- ROTATED LATERAL INCISOR
- NARROW JAWS
- TONGUE THRUSTS
- MISSING TEETH

##### What problems are not hereditary in your mouth?

- GRINDING TEETH
- CLENCHING OR CHEEK BITING
- CAVITIES
- RECEDING GUMS

#### By Dr. Linda Winter

To whom am I related?

One of the many joys of creating healthy smiles for the last 29 years has been caring for up to four generations of a family at a time. Then the wonders of genetics are readily evident.

The gap that Uncle Joe has between his two front teeth; the cute little rotated lateral incisor that all the women in your family have. We see these and more in our daily work. Narrow jaw sizes, tongue thrusts, congenitally missing teeth... all are inherited.

Even more fun are dental conditions that will skip generations because they are genetically recessive traits. The most common ones are tori - which are bony lumps in the middle of your palate or often a pair on the sides of the floor of the mouth. If you have them and your parents and siblings do not, go back and look in your grandparents' or great-grandparents' mouths and you will find they have them too!

When a parent is naturally missing a permanent (adult) tooth, often one or more of their

children will be missing the same tooth. I have worked with two families where one of the parents was congenitally missing seven or more teeth. In these situations, their teeth grew through the bone too far out toward their cheeks leaving no gum tissue well attached to the bone. Knowing that a parent had this problem may aid the dentist in intervening early for those children.

Not all conditions are inherited. Some people grind their teeth down flat due to habits or responses to stress. Clenching or cheek biting may even be learned patterns in angry, bored or stressful situations. Some people believe they can blame their cavities on their parents' teeth when what was really passed on to them was the decay-producing bacteria through kissing, sharing glasses or toothbrushes. Others may have receding gums that are not inherited but are caused by gum disease, crowded teeth or stressful forces on the teeth.

So next time you look at your family tree (or consider who you may marry!), take a look at their smiles to learn your family's secrets. Sharing your observations with each other may make you more informed about your family - and may lead to a few good chuckles!

*For more information on Dr. Linda Winter and her practice, Winter Park Dentistry, call her office at (316) 722-2166 or visit her website at [www.smilewichita.com](http://www.smilewichita.com).*



Dr. Linda Winter  
Winter Park Dentistry

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*Dr. Linda Winter*

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