

Slenderization

Sometime we need some **extra room** to straighten teeth but not enough to justify extractions. When this happens we can obtain space by removing a small amount of interproximal (between the teeth) enamel. A very fine diamond wheel is used to polish off no more than a ½ millimeter of enamel from each surface. We call this slenderizing and it has been shown to be a very safe, efficient, and painless procedure. Removal of even a very small amount of the enamel on the contact surfaces of multiple teeth can provide a significant amount of room. We still leave most of the enamel and the slenderization is done in areas that very seldom decay. The only problem we have ever seen is, very rarely, a temporary sensitivity to temperature changes.

Anterior teeth tend to be triangular in shape with the tooth-to-tooth contact up near the biting edges and the space below filled in with gum tissue (gingival papilla). If the teeth are very **crowded and rotated** this gum tissue can be squeezed out of the area (especially in older patients). When the teeth are straightened sometimes a dark triangular space appears between the teeth. This happens even though the teeth are touching as the small papilla fails to fill up the entire space. Gum tissue does not grow to fill in this space and even gum surgery is limited in its ability to restore this tissue.

Other times as we **age**, or because of **gum disease**, this gum tissue shrinks and the dark triangular space appears between the teeth. In both these cases we sometimes can reshape the teeth by removing the tooth “corners” with a special diamond wheel to allow the teeth to move closer together. This is often done to relieve crowding. As this happens, the dark triangular spaces can be reduced or eliminated. We call this procedure slenderization and it has been shown to be a very safe, efficient, and painless procedure. We still leave most of the enamel and the slenerdizing is done in areas that very seldom decay. The only problem we have ever seen is very rarely a temporary sensitivity to temperature changes. If some residual triangular space remains your dentist can often bond some tooth colored material to the sides of the teeth to fill up the dark space.