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POST-MENOPAUSAL WOMEN SHOULD HAVE MORE FREQUENT DENTAL CLEANING

(December, 2011) The current recommendation for two annual dental checkups are not enough for post-menopausal women according to recently published research findings from a study conducted by the Case Western Reserve University School of Dental Medicine and the Cleveland Clinic. During a comparison study of women on and off bone-strengthening bisphosphonate therapies for osteoporosis, conducted by Leena Palomo, assistant professor of periodontics from the dental school, and Maria Clarinda Beunocamino-Francisco, from the Center for Specialized Women's Health at the clinic, it was discovered that both groups of women had abnormally increased dental plaque levels, which could endanger the jawbone of all postmenopausal women and reverse any benefits gained in bone mass.

Bacterial dental plaque is the primary cause of periodontal (gum) disease, which can lead to bone loss in the jaw and inflammatory processes. After menopause, women become more susceptible to periodontal disease largely due to estrogen deficiency.

The study's findings suggest that post-menopausal women may have an increased risk for periodontal disease and therefore, could potentially lose their teeth if associated bone loss isn't stopped. Since the study has shown that bisphosphonate therapy isn't enough to keep jawbones strong and healthy, other approaches are needed to eliminate or reduce the dental plaque attributing to periodontal disease.

Dr. Palomo advised that post menopausal women may need to see the dentist as many as four times a year to control dental plaque by deep periodontal cleanings. The researchers have encouraged physicians to be on the lookout for dental problems with their patients and to encourage them to practice good oral hygiene and seek regular dental care. Diagnosing osteoporosis and periodontal disease early is key so that treatment can begin quickly and fractures and tooth loss can be prevented.

The research findings were announced in the article, "Is long-term bisphosphonate therapy associated with benefits to the periodontium in postmenopausal women?" that was published in the February issue of *Menopause*. The study included Twenty-eight postmenopausal women with normal bones were compared with 28 women who had been on bisphosphonate therapies for at least two years or more. The participants (all between the ages of 51 and 80) underwent cone beam CT scans of their jaws and a complete periodontal check for dental plaque, bleeding, and loss of bone attachment and of the alveolar bone socket. Both groups of women had followed the recommended American Dental Association oral health standards to brush twice daily, floss and have at least two dental checkups a year.