

# PERIODONTAL MAINTENANCE AND YOUR INSURANCE

## What is periodontal disease?

Periodontal disease can be described as an inflammation and/or infection of the gums and bone that support the teeth. Bacterial plaque, and its toxic by-products, plus calculus and roughened root surfaces can overwhelm the mouth's defenses. Typically, unhealthy gum tissue covers eroded bone, resulting in abnormal *pockets* around the roots. You may notice that your gums bleed easily, that you have a bad taste in your mouth that your gums appear red or swollen, that your teeth appear longer or have shifted. Or you may not notice anything at all. Left untreated, periodontal disease can result in loss of teeth.

## What is a periodontal maintenance procedure?

The American Dental Association describes periodontal maintenance as a *procedure for patients who have previously been treated for periodontal disease... (which) continues at varying intervals, determined by the clinical diagnosis of the dentist, for the life of the dentition (for the life of the teeth)... (and) includes the removal of the supra and subgingival microbial flora and calculus, site specific scaling and root planing.*

- *Previously treated for periodontal disease* means that a patient has received scaling and root planing or periodontal surgery in the past.
- *The removal of the supra and subgingival microbial flora and calculus* means that any deposits and/or bacteria (microbial flora) that are in place either above or below the gum line are scaled away.
- *Root planing* means that root surfaces, both above and below the gum line are scaled and smoothed to remove calculus and diseased dentin.

A periodontal maintenance procedure is not the same treatment as a *regular* cleaning even though a hygienist may perform both services. A periodontal maintenance procedure, also known as PMP, includes but may not be limited to:

- A update of your medical and dental history;
- X-ray review;
- Mouth/face exam- inside and outside including cheeks, lips, tongue, gums, throat;
- Tooth examination (by the dentist);
- Gum and bone examination;
- Review of home care;
- Scaling and root planing, as needed;
- Polishing of teeth as needed;
- Gums and *pocket* irrigation with medicine, as needed.

Typically, an interval of three months between appointments is effective. These periodontal maintenance visits are not considered *regular* cleanings due to the nature of disease control. The bacteria causing periodontal disease re-establishes itself in as little as 90 days and it is critical to disrupt this process in order to disable the destructive process. There is no cure for periodontal disease, it can only be managed or controlled. The successful long-term control of periodontal disease depends upon active and continuous maintenance therapy.

**I understand that I need to come frequently for periodontal maintenance.  
How often will my insurance pay?**

Many insurance plans pay for periodontal maintenance twice a year, even though most patients require appointments four times a year. Additionally, it is common for insurance companies to apply your deductible to periodontal maintenance procedures, and sometimes cover them at a lower percentage than they cover regular cleanings. Remember that insurance plans limit the number of exams, cleanings, and periodontal maintenance appointments they will cover because these are the types of treatments that many people need to have more frequently. The good news is that any amount paid reduces your out-of-pocket cost, and even if your insurance does not provide benefits for your periodontal maintenance procedure, you still get the advantage of paying a lower fee since our office is contracted with your insurance company.

**If my insurance plan will only pay for periodontal maintenance twice a year,  
why should I have it done more often?**

Your insurance plan can help you pay for the treatment that you need, however it was never designed to pay for everything. Most plans typically pay a minimum regardless of what you might need as an individual. It is a mistake to let benefits be your sole consideration when you make decisions about your dental condition. People who have lost their teeth often say that they would pay any amount of money to get them back. Your teeth, smile, attractiveness, ability to chew and enjoy food, and general sense of well being are dependant on your dental health. It is worth the extra time and expense to keep your teeth for a lifetime.

