Take a Bite Out of Gum Disease
By Seeing a Periodontist

(NU) - Many people know that seeing a dentist twice a year is a key to keeping teeth clean and healthy. Those regular visits ensure your choppers are cavity-free, and perhaps it’s a chance for the dentist to chastise you for not flossing enough. However, you shouldn’t simply stop there.

According to a new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently published in the Journal of Periodontology, nearly 65 million Americans suffer from gum disease, also known as periodontitis. Symptoms can include red, tender, or bleeding gums; loosening of the teeth; and receding gums. If you experience these symptoms, a trip to a periodontist – a dentist who specializes in treating gum disease – should be added to your twice-yearly dental check-ups.

“Periodontal disease remains a significant public health issue for people of all backgrounds,” said Joan Otomo-Corgel, DDS, MPH, president of the American Academy of Periodontology (AAP) and a practicing periodontist in Los Angeles. “However, with the proper treatment and care, periodontal disease is often reversible.”

If you suspect that you might require the expert care of a periodontist, here are four things you should know:

• Know the cause. Poor oral hygiene is a major culprit in the development of gum disease. More than 500 different species of bacteria can be found in dental plaque, highlighting the importance of brushing your teeth twice a day and flossing regularly.

• Know your risk. There is a genetic component to gum disease, but lifestyle choices also can increase your chances of developing gum disease. Smoking, age, taking certain medications, obesity, poor nutrition and stress may all increase your susceptibility.

• Know where to go. Take the “Gums 101” quiz on perio.org/loveyourgums to evaluate the overall health of your gums, learn the signs and symptoms of periodontal disease and find tips on how to care for your gums. You can also search for a periodontist in your area.

• Know how often to go. The AAP recommends that adults undergo a comprehensive periodontal evaluation every year to ensure the health of gums and teeth.

“If a person is found to have periodontal disease, a periodontist can determine the best course of treatment,” said Otomo-Corgel.

For more information about the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of gum disease, visit perio.org.