

the load on each remaining tooth because there are fewer of them. This can be compared with losing fence posts in a long fence. The fence is not any shorter, but there are fewer posts supporting the fence. The fence is not as strong now as it was earlier. In the case of the fence, it is obvious that fence posts need to be added so that the amount of support will be increased, and similarly these areas in the mouth need to be aided by replacing the missing root structure by means of implants.

PARTIAL DENTURES

Does a removable partial denture replace the missing teeth equally as well? Partial dentures are either tooth-supported or tooth and gum supported. If it is entirely tooth-supported, the space has been replaced or filled in, but the supporting teeth are no more than they were before. In other words, the load has been increased on the remaining teeth. In the case of a partial denture which is both tooth and gum-supported, the number of teeth has not increased (there is still no more root support than there was before). The areas where teeth are missing have been filled in with gum-supported denture teeth. This means that the gum tissue and bone under these denture teeth areas will shrink gradually, and the partial denture will have to be remade or relined periodically. If these areas are not relined, then a space develops under the denture. It is not bearing its fair share of the chewing load, and the remaining natural teeth are carrying all of the chewing load. The teeth are overloaded. Under these conditions, the remaining teeth will undergo accelerated bone loss. Also this partial denture is removable. It is not permanently fastened in the mouth as a nonremovable bridge would be.

TOOTH SUPPORTING BONE

Nature has provided tooth supporting bone during the years when there are teeth present in the mouth. When the teeth are lost, the tooth supporting bone is also lost. Nature takes away from you what you do not use! For example, the person who is confined to bed for a long period of time loses muscle tone. The muscles get soft and literally wither away. In the mouth, the bone under the gums "shrinks", and dentures get loose. Notice in the mouth of a person who has lost half of his teeth, the bone is present around the teeth which remain. Where the teeth have been lost, many times it looks like the back of a "sway-backed" horse. Where implants have been placed and properly maintained, the tendency is to preserve this bone because they are used somewhat in the same way it was when the teeth were present.