DELTA DENTAL

The Facts about Silver Fillings

Dental Amalgam (commonly called silver filling) has been in regular use by dentists for more than 150 years as a way to treat cavities. It continues to be a popular and safe treatment today. In fact, tens of millions of amalgam restorations are placed each year in the U.S. and around the world.

WHAT IS DENTAL AMALGAM?

Dental amalgam is a mixture of mercury, and an alloy of silver, tin and copper. Mercury is used to hold the metals together and to provide a strong, hard durable filling. Years of research have confirmed that mercury is the only element that holds these metals together so they can be easily used to fill a tooth cavity.

IS MERCURY IN DENTAL AMALGAM SAFE?

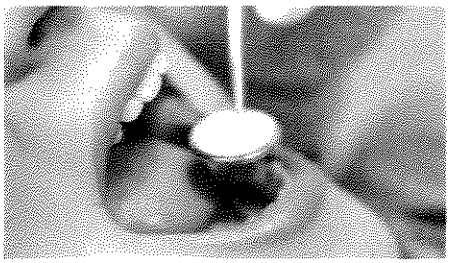
The safety of dental amalgams has been reviewed extensively over the past 10 years. That research found that mercury is essentially harmless when it is combined with other materials in dental amalgam.

Much of the excess mercury is squeezed out of the filling when the filling is pressed into the cavity.

That is the small squeaking sound you hear when getting an amalgam filling. This excess mercury is discarded. This leaves only a small amount bound to the other metals.

	AMALGAM (silver fillings)	COMPOSITE (white fillings)
Advantages	• Durable • Economical • Less chair time	• Matched to tooth color • Less tooth structure is removed
Disadvantages	• Tooth color appears silver or grey	• Can take longer to place than amalgam • Cost can be up to 30 % more • More prone to wear and breakage and staining • Patient may experience post-op sensitivity

The amount released in the mouth under the pressure of chewing and grinding is extremely small and no cause for alarm. In fact, it is less than what patients are exposed to in food, air,and water.



WHY DO DENTISTS USE DENTAL AMALGAM?

In short, dentists use amalgam because it has withstood the test of time. It has a 150-year proven track record and is still one of the safest, durable and affordable materials to a fill a cavity.

WHAT ARE THE ALTERNATIVES TO AMALGAM?

There are alternatives to amalgam such as composite resins (white) fillings. A composite filling is a tooth colored combination of a glass or quartz filler and acrylic that is self-hardened or hardened with the use of a special light. This alternative material is more costly.

ARE COMPOSITES SAFE?

Concern has been expressed about some components and byproduct components generated from some composite resins. However, there is no credible body of scientific evidence that composite fillings cause adverse health effects in the general population.

Before making a selection, talk to your dental professional and weigh the options. In fact the FDA categorizes encapsulated dental amalgam as a class II medical device, placing it in the same class as gold and tooth-colored (white) composite fillings.

Delta Dental of Massachusetts members are encouraged to visit www.Ada.org, which contains credible and helpful information for the public about dental filling choice.

Delta Dental of Massachusetts members have the freedom to choose either amalgam or composite restorations. Standard policy benefits amalgam restoration for posterior (back) teeth and composite restoration for anterior(front) teeth. If a member chooses composite on a posterior tooth the benefit is an alternate benefit to the corresponding amalgam restoration.