

## **Dental Amalgams - Dealing with Old Silver Fillings**

Dental amalgams, commonly known as "silver fillings", have been used to replace decay in teeth since the 1830's. Like all things in science and medicine, materials and techniques in dentistry are constantly improving and changing. Undoubtedly, the ability of amalgam to replace missing tooth structure and wear well has been proven, but the safety of dental amalgams is still a controversial issue.

Dental amalgams can contain up to 50% mercury, and its slow release into the body is the concern. The World Health Organization reports, "Amalgam restorations are safe and cost-effective...Components in dental restorative materials, including amalgam, may, in rare instances, result in local side-effects or allergic reactions." The FDA reached similar conclusions. However, several countries, including Canada, Sweden, and New Zealand have decided to ban the placement of dental amalgams due to its potential risks. Studies on this issue are ongoing.

Amalgam use in dentistry is on the decline. Newer, tooth-colored filling materials have been developed that release fluoride and are mercury free.

Another common problem I see with older amalgam fillings is their tendency to cause tooth fracture. The expansion of amalgam with heat and cold compared to natural tooth structure is different. Long-term, this typically results in minor cracks in teeth. The cracks sometimes become so large that part of the tooth breaks.

Patients often ask me if they should have all of their amalgams replaced. At this point I can't definitely say yes. However, often amalgams need to be replaced because they are worn-out, leaking or broken.

If you have any questions, I would encourage you to come by our state-of-the-art practice and we can discuss your specific needs. For anxious patients, we offer nitrous oxide gas and oral sedation, allowing you to receive treatment in a relaxed and comfortable environment.