



Which Filling Material Is Best For Me?

Dentists in Australia use amalgam fillings to repair and restore millions of teeth every year. Dental amalgam is strong, long lasting, easy to use and inexpensive.

Amalgam has stood the test of time. During the past 160 years, it has been used in the teeth of millions of people around the world. Amalgam still has an important role in modern dentistry.

In recent years some people have claimed that mercury in amalgam can cause slow poisoning because small amounts are released from the filling and can get into the blood. This is claimed to cause a variety of health concerns.

However, mercury compounds in amalgam are poorly taken up by the body. While small amounts of mercury from amalgam do get into the blood, they are removed from the blood by the kidneys and passed out of the body in the urine.

Scientific tests have shown that people with no amalgam restorations expire nearly as much mercury as those with amalgam fillings.

Apart from dental amalgam, there are a number of sources of mercury in our environment. Foods and smoking are the highest sources of mercury in the body. 60 grams of tuna may provide as much mercury as having 10 amalgam fillings over a life-time. Nearly all the mercury in the body comes from foods. Removing your amalgam fillings will lower the concentration of mercury in your body only slightly, if at all.

Removal Of Amalgam

Some dentists and health practitioners have claimed that removing the amalgam fillings and replacing them with other materials may cure illnesses supposedly linked to mercury from the amalgam.

Although unproven, these claims have been widely reported in the media. Therefore, some people with amalgam fillings have been unnecessarily worried about possible side-effects.

They may have asked their dentist to replace their amalgam fillings with other materials. All of which have advantages and disadvantages. However, amalgam remains a safe and cost-effective material in many cases.

Support For Dental Amalgam

The use of dental amalgam has been supported by many professional dental and medical organisations throughout the world. This includes the Australian Dental Association, The National Health and Medical Research Council and the World Health Organisation.

They believe dental amalgam is safe, with little risk of any side effects. They do not support the view that amalgam causes illness or problems with general health and well-being. They believe that amalgam fillings should not be removed and replaced with other types of materials or that teeth with amalgam or root fillings be extracted.

Recently the American court system has concluded that the removal of sound amalgam restorations to cure medical conditions was not supported by current evidence and is possibly

illegal. The State of Colorado has cancelled the licence of leading anti-amalgamist, Dr Hal Huggins. Dr Huggins is currently being sued by former patients who did not get better once their amalgam restorations were removed.

Known Side Effects Of Dental Amalgam

In rare cases dental amalgam can cause

1. an allergic reaction in the tissues near the filling, such as redness, swelling or itching.
2. Small white lesions to the gum or inside of the cheek

Alternative Materials

1. Gold

Gold restorations are by far the best. They have a long and successful history which offsets their cost. Multiple visits are required and each restoration is hand made by a laboratory technician.

2. Ceramic

Metal supported ceramic restorations are very durable and long lasting. They are usually in the form of crowns which are used to reinforce weakened teeth, not as filling substitutes.

Ceramic inlays (fillings) are bonded to the teeth. They are very technique sensitive, and are made by a laboratory technician. Research shows that 50% of these restorations will fail after 3 years. They are not a very good alternative.

3. Resins (White Fillings)

They are not as strong as amalgam and are more susceptible to the heavy grinding forces on back teeth. These materials are bonded to the tooth, but this does not reinforce the tooth in any way. In large fillings the resin may be bonded to the dentine or root surface. This is a weak bond and may begin to breakdown after 2-3 years. Hence, this material is prone to developing recurrent caries along its deeper margins. This can only be detected by X-rays until the lesion becomes large and causes pain. At which time the nerve may be diseased and require root canal therapy. They are difficult to place and contour which may lead to food packing and bite problems accelerating the demise of the tooth. Due to the time required to place these restorations correctly their cost is larger than that of a comparable amalgam restoration, however materials technology is constantly improving of these restorations increasing the success.

4. Amalgam

Is safe, cost effective strong and durable. Amalgam usually protects a tooth against further decay better than most other filling materials. It can withstand the high stresses imposed on a restoration of back teeth. It can be easily contoured to improve cleaning and chewing.

Summary

- Dental amalgam is safe, cost effective, strong and durable.
- The only proven side effects of dental amalgam are an allergic reaction occurring in the gum near the filling.
- The highest sources of mercury in our bodies come from foods and smoking.
- There is no difference between the health of populations of people with amalgam fillings and those with no amalgam fillings.
- People that have amalgam fillings replaced to cure recognized medical conditions do not get better when their amalgams are replaced with alternatives.

Your Decision

You always have the right to decide what filling material to use. Your dentist can advise you as to what they feel is the most appropriate restorative material for your situation. All suitable options will be discussed including costs, risks to teeth, oral health and general health. However, the choice is ultimately yours.