Mercury in dental fillings [1]

Dear Alice,

My friends tell me it's dangerous to use amalgam ("silver") fillings because the mercury binder can leach out over time and be absorbed by the body. My dentist tells me they're perfectly safe. What's the deal?

?Toothy

Answer

Dear Toothy,

Just when you think the hooks and drills are scary enough, rumor has it that dentists want to put toxic mercury in your mouth, too! Rest assured, dental amalgam fillings are backed by 150 years of safety and effectiveness. Based on the results of extensive scientific research, the following organizations all support the safety and effectiveness of amalgam as a dental restorative material:

- The American Dental Association (ADA)
- The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
- The U.S. Public Health Service (PHS)
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- The National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- The World Health Organization (WHO)
- The National Institutes of Dental Research
- And the FDI World Dental Federation

Needless to say, amalgam fillings are well recommended.

Dental amalgam is a mixture of silver, elemental mercury, tin, and copper that is generally used to fill the cracks, holes, and cavities caused by tooth decay [2]. Mercury is added to the mixture in order to bond all of the other metals together, and to form a hard and durable material designed to restore your teeth to a healthy level of functioning.

As you may know, high levels of mercury [3] in the body are known to be dangerous to brain and kidney health. Fortunately, research has shown that people with amalgam fillings do not have significantly increased amounts of mercury in their bodies compared to others? this is true whether the person has one amalgam filling or fifteen. Additionally, there is no evidence to support the claim that the mercury used in dental amalgams can leach into your
bloodstream in significant amounts and cause a variety of conditions, ranging from insomnia to multiple sclerosis.

Despite the general safety of amalgam, some dental patients would prefer an alternative type of filling. In addition, some people are allergic to some components of amalgam fillings. Perhaps your dentist can help you determine which type of filling is best for you. Presently, five other types of restorative materials are used for tooth decay, including:

- Resin composite
- Glass ionomer
- Resin ionomer
- Porcelain
- Gold alloys

Regardless of what kind of fillings you choose to have, you don’t have to worry about dental amalgam causing more problems than it solves. Filler up!

Alice!
Category:
General Health [4]
Oral Health [5]

Related questions

Dental care in NYC [6]
Clean mouth = good health? [7]
The cold, hard truth: Chewing ice and teeth [8]
Receding gums [9]
Mercury poisoning: Something fishy about too much tuna? [10]

Published date:
Feb 16, 1995
Last reviewed on:
Jul 29, 2015

Footer menu

- Contact Alice!
  - Content Use
  - Media Inquiries
  - Comments & Corrections
- Syndication & Licensing
  - Licensing Q&As
  - Get Alice! on Your Website
  - Full Site Syndication
  - Link to Go Ask Alice!

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.
If you are in an urgent situation, please visit our Emergency page to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/mercury-dental-fillings#comment-0

Links