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Dental Amalgam

What is dental amalgam?

Dental amalgams or silver fillings have reportedly been used as early as 659 A.D. France began using the materials in 1826 and the United States in 1833. Dental amalgam is made out of a mixture of metals such as silver, copper, tin and bound with mercury. The mercury makes up between 45-50 percent of the mixture and acts as glue that binds the components into a hard, stable, and safe substance that is manipulated and adhered to your tooth. The use of dental amalgam is declining with the use of newer materials like composite resins.

Is dental amalgam safe?

Dental amalgam has been used for more than 150 years and can last in a patient's mouth for more than 12 years. No scientific studies have demonstrated that the mercury contained in dental amalgam is harmful. For example, studies show that the mercury found in a filling is less than a person's normal exposure to the mercury found in food, water, and air. Therefore, dentists continue to place amalgam restorations where appropriate. The United States Public Health Service and the Food and Drug Administration Dental Products Panel are some of the many organizations that have determined amalgam is safe for preserving a tooth's structure. Amalgam has been claimed to cause some health problems, such as dizziness, headaches, fatigue, nervousness and sometimes compromised general health. The only people, however, who have been found to have a true reaction to amalgam, are those who are allergic to mercury, which is approximately one percent of the population. If you think you have sensitivity to amalgam, ask your physician for a blood test.

Should I get my amalgam fillings replaced?

With all the questions about amalgam, many people wonder whether they should have their silver fillings replaced. If a silver filling has decay under or around it, then the filling needs to be replaced. If a silver filling has open margins so that food and bacteria can penetrate the tooth/filling interface, the filling needs to be replaced. Otherwise, we recommend leaving your silver fillings alone. Removal of silver fillings without reason may cause structural damage to your teeth, depending of the filling's size and may cause unnecessary expense.

If you have any further questions about amalgam fillings please do not hesitate to ask us.