

Mercury Based Fillings, Are They Dangerous?

The answer to this question depends on who you ask. According to the American Dental Association researchers, there is no problem. So write internationally recognized experts in mercury toxicology in "The Toxicology of Mercury-Current Exposures and Clinical Manifestations," a review article published October 30, 2003, in the New England Journal of Medicine. Researchers have found that urinary mercury concentrations (a measure of mercury toxicity) in patients with mercury-based fillings (amalgams) are only about two to four micrograms per liter—"well below" the 20 to 50-microgram levels in persons with occupational exposure. This level is considered acceptable...but then how much is too much? The other controversial factor is how accurate is the detection process for accessing what levels of mercury may be stored in other body tissues and not show up with the testing procedures being used.

According to other alternative health care advocates and a smaller yet vocal group of "Holistic" or "Biologic" dentists, mercury fillings are a significant threat to health. The litany of effects include about every possible symptom, including the tendency to develop neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, and Parkinson's disease, along with disorders such as Autism, ADD and ADHD. Neither side of the controversy recognizes the other's

medical studies as being accurate or agreed upon, what mercury levels in the body might be harmful.

So who do we believe and what should we do with those old amalgam fillings placed in our mouth when we were younger? First, don't have any more of them placed in your adult teeth! There are many other porcelain and composite based tooth colored fillings that are superior in many ways.

WHAT TO DO, THE OPTIONS

Cosmetically, there is no comparison to the appearance of a tooth colored life like filling or crown, relative to the old silver mercury fillings. With passing years the silver fillings oxidize and begin to darken and weaken the tooth. A youthful smile can accompany a mercury free environment in the mouth.

Second, assess your perceived health threat based on medical concerns, personal research, and your belief system (not always that easy). There is definitely a small percentage of the population that are "sensitives," and may have genetic factors that compromise the body's natural abilities to eliminate build up of toxic materials such as mercury. This results in a cumulative build up of mercury to potentially dangerous levels over time. Certain blood tests are available that can detect antigens in the blood that would show exaggerated sensitivity to mercury and other materials used in dentistry. A complete medical history and dental examination helps

us access those who might be at risk.

There are many techniques suggested for removing mercury based amalgam fillings, many of which are quite extreme and perhaps questionable. However, due caution should be appropriate, and for many "sensitive" individuals more strict removal protocols observed.

Protocols:

FILLING REMOVAL:

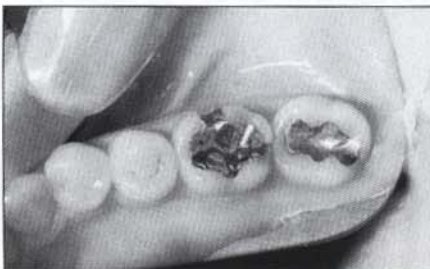
Masking and plenty of water with high evacuation (rinsing and suction) to remove all mercury amalgam particles and vapor. This is actually done when any material is removed from the mouth during dental procedures. Bacterial aerosols are also dangerous, and all efforts are made to prevent dental personnel and patients from swallowing or breathing them.

NUTRITIONAL SUPPORT:

Nutritional protocols are used to help remove existing systemic toxicity from mercury and other heavy metal contaminants, and those that might be released during filling removal. A process called "chelating" or bonding of the contaminant to another substance so it can be removed from the body tissues and eliminated achieves this. There are many supplemental programs utilizing vitamins, minerals, algae, and other substances that are recognized as good chelating

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Before

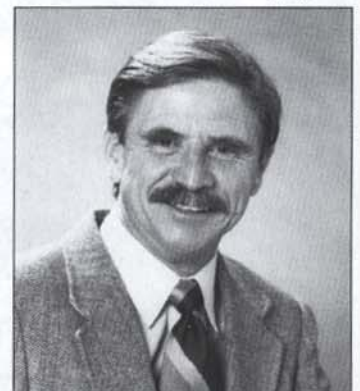


Old mercury-based amalgam fillings before replacement.

After



Teeth restored with tooth-colored restorative materials.



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agents. The extent to which one pursues this depends on the perceived danger of mercury contamination systemically.

When patients come to our office requesting the removal of their mercury based fillings, we carefully access their risk factors and develop a protocol that is appropriate for their particular situation. Indiscriminate removal of these fillings can often lead to unnecessary future health problems and expenses. Unfortunately we have seen many bite and tissue related problems result when an appropriate protocol was not followed.

Ultimately, we live in a toxic universe, and it is impossible to avoid being exposed to many potentially dangerous environmental substances. In fact, even the friendliest substances can kill us in excess. Still, this is no excuse to expose ourselves to unnecessary potentially toxic substances if they can be avoided. Mercury based fillings are definitely avoidable.

Jerry Bottomley

Dr. Jerry Bottomley received his undergraduate training at UCLA, his dental degree from UC San Francisco Medical Center. He has been in private practice in Rolling Hills Estates since 1971. Dr. Bottomley's interest and continuing education has centered around artistry in dentistry, nutrition, and alternative holistic approaches to achieving optimum oral health for his patients. He has also completed a six-year continuum at the Pankey Institute for Advanced Dentistry

