



Amalgam fillings for teeth

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 not expensive.

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 the mercury in amalgam can cause slow poisoning because small amounts are released from the filling and get into the blood. This is claimed to have caused 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.

Apart from dental amalgam, there are a number of sources of mercury in our environment, including many foods. These cause no harm to health as long as the amounts are very small.

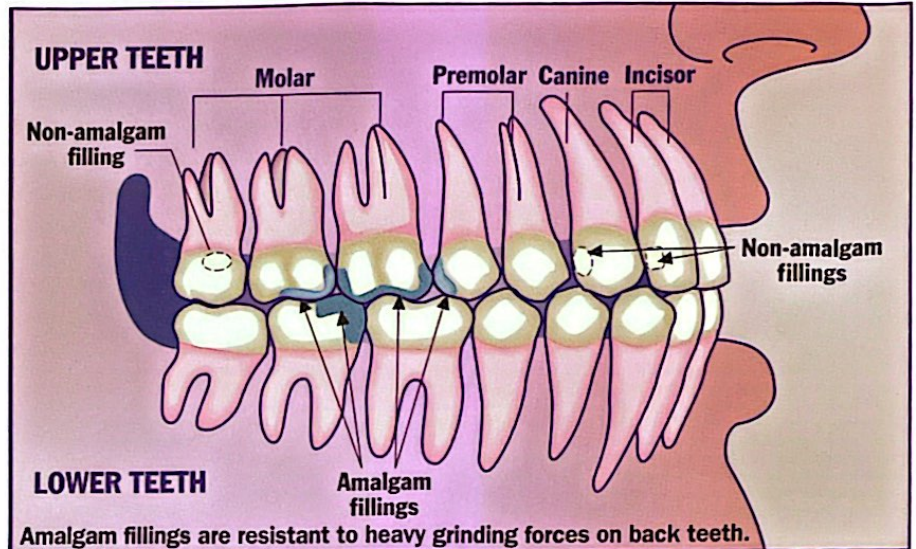
REMOVAL OF AMALGAM: Some dentists and health practitioners have claimed that removing the amalgam fillings and replacing them with other materials may cure illnesses supposedly

What dental amalgam is made of

Dental amalgam is made of silver, tin, copper and mercury. Before the dentist makes the amalgam, the silver, tin and copper are in a powder form, and the mercury is a liquid.

When the powder and the liquid are mixed together, they form a soft mass, like putty. After the dentist fills the tooth with the soft amalgam, it quickly sets and becomes very hard.

Improvements to amalgam in recent years have resulted in stronger, more durable and more stable fillings.



TALK TO YOUR DENTIST

This leaflet is a summary of what is known about dental amalgam. It does not replace advice from your dentist and should be used only in consultation with your dentist. It does not contain all known facts about dental amalgam. If you are not sure about the safety of dental amalgam, ask your dentist. Your dentist will be pleased to answer any questions or concerns you may have about amalgam, what it is made of, and how it is used.

linked to mercury from the amalgam.

Although unproven, these claims have been widely reported in newspapers and magazines, and on television and radio. Therefore, some people with amalgam fillings have been unnecessarily worried about possible side effects.

They may have asked their dentists to replace their amalgam fillings with other materials. These include ceramics, plastics and glass-based agents, which are white fillings, and gold alloys. All of these have advantages and disadvantages. However, amalgam is still 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, including the Australian Dental Association and the National

Health and Medical Research Council.

These organisations consider that dental amalgam is safe, with little risk of any side effects. It is possible (but unlikely) that amalgam could have side effects which are not yet known or proven. It is not possible to guarantee that any tooth-filling material or technique is without risk.

The Australian Dental Association, the National Health and Medical Research Council, and the World Health Organization do **NOT** support the views that: amalgam causes illnesses or problems with general health and well-being; amalgam fillings should be removed and replaced with other types of materials; and teeth with amalgam or root fillings should be extracted.

If you have a health problem that you think may be linked to dental amalgam, tell your dentist or medical practitioner.



Known side effects of dental amalgam

In a small number of people, dental amalgam may cause:

- an allergic reaction in tissue near the filling, such as swelling, redness and itching.
- small sores to the gum and the inside of the cheek; these are called "lichen planus", also known as "oral lichenoid lesions".

Dentists' concerns about replacing amalgam

Most dentists do not believe that amalgam is a risk to health. Their concern is that treatment to replace a patient's amalgam fillings:

- may needlessly damage or weaken teeth
- can be painful
- could actually harm the person's dental health
- is a waste of money.

A dentist may be reluctant to remove amalgam fillings if he or she believes removal is not necessary and could be harmful to the patient.

If a patient insists on having amalgam fillings replaced or amalgam-filled teeth removed, the dentist may:

- arrange for a referral to another dentist
- treat the person after discussing costs, risks to teeth, oral health and general health.

No "Specialists" for removal

Removal of dental amalgam does not have to be done by a "Specialist". There

is no "Specialist" professional qualification for the removal of amalgam fillings and replacement with other fillings.

All dentists are trained in the removal of amalgam.

Similarly, all dentists are trained in the use of amalgam and non-amalgam materials to repair teeth.

Your decision

You always have the right to decide whether you want amalgam fillings left in or taken out. It is your choice alone. You should not be pressured by a dentist or anyone else to have your amalgam fillings taken out.

If you are uncertain about your dentist's advice concerning amalgam fillings or any other issues about your teeth and oral health, feel free to get the opinion of another dentist.

White fillings

Some people prefer white fillings because they have a much better appearance. Where possible, dentists will use these materials.

However, these non-amalgam fillings are not as strong as amalgam and are not as resistant to the heavy grinding forces on the back teeth. In teeth which have a lot of grinding force and pressure on them, amalgam is usually a better material.

Less use of dental amalgam

Dental amalgam is slowly being phased out. However, while new techniques and materials are promising, they are generally not as good as amalgam or not sufficiently proven.

TELEPHONE INTERPRETER SERVICE

If you have trouble reading English, telephone the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50.

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VIETNAMESE
Nếu quý vị không đọc được tiếng Anh, vui lòng điện thoại cho Sở Thông-ngôn và Phiên-dịch qua số 13 14 50.



What you should know about dental amalgam

The following conclusions have been made by health researchers from Australia and other countries after many studies on dental amalgam.

- Dental amalgam is safe, cost effective, strong and durable.
- The only proven side effects of dental amalgam are lichen planus (small sores) and an allergic reaction near the filling, but these are rare. Studies have not proven that amalgam fillings are linked to other illnesses or diseases.
- Apart from dental amalgam, a number of sources of mercury are in our environment, including many foods. These cause no harm to health

as long as the amounts are very small.

- Studies on large numbers of people who had amalgam fillings replaced have not shown measurable improvements to health.
- Needless removal of amalgam can damage the tooth.
- Amalgam usually protects a tooth against further decay better than some other fillings.
- Other types of fillings are, in many ways, not as good as amalgam fillings.
- The major disadvantages of amalgam are as follows:
 - it is not tooth coloured;

- it doesn't have the natural ability to bond to the tooth as well as some other types of fillings; and
- more of the tooth substance must be removed to get the amalgam to stay in the tooth.

The Australian Dental Association does not recommend:

- the replacement of amalgam fillings with different materials unless there are sound reasons for dental and oral health.
- the extraction of teeth solely because they have had amalgam or root fillings, unless there are sound reasons for dental and oral health.

This pamphlet, or portions of it, should not be photocopied and handed out.