

SAFETY OF SILVER AMALGAM AND BASE METALS

The practice of the art and science of dentistry has changed tremendously during the last 15 to 20 years. Nowhere is this more evident than in the variety of dental materials now available for tooth restoration. Composite resins (tooth-colored bonding plastics) permit us to restore teeth with less removal (drilling) of sound tooth structure. The composites look like natural tooth structure, are bonded to the tooth for a tight seal, last a long time, and add back strength to the prepared tooth. Silver amalgam (metal filling) materials do not look like natural teeth; they leak fluids at the tooth/metal interface; can crack teeth by volumetric and thermal expansion; require more removal of tooth structure than is required to eliminate decay; make the tooth weaker; and can last a long time but often seriously damage the tooth while in place. Silver fillings were invented around 1814 by the French as a temporary, inexpensive filling material to be used until the patient could afford a better – quality gold restoration. Back then, the dentist in the United States were so horrified by the use of the silver/mercury material that it was not allowed to be imported into the United States, or even taught in the dental schools, for many years.

Base metals have been used in dentistry as an inexpensive alternative to the noble and high noble metals. Noble and high noble metals contain precious metals such as gold, palladium, and platinum in varying percentages. Base metals are composed of metals that can have high allergenic, toxic, or even carcinogenic properties. Since 1976, we have never specified base metals be used in any laboratory processed restoration. We have used casting metals that are of proven high quality. Because we are considerate of your overall medical health, we do not offer base metals as an option for any crown, bridge, or implant-supported casting.

We have made a decision in our practice to provide you with the best and most appropriate procedures and materials that dentistry has to offer. This does not necessarily mean the most expensive treatment. We want them to look good and be functional and comfortable too. We feel that silver amalgam materials will not help you meet this goal. We feel that routine use of new silver fillings and base metal has no place in dentistry today. We have elected to eliminate this material and procedure from our practice.

If You Have Dental Insurance

Insurance carriers routinely provide benefits for tooth – colored, bonded composite restorations for back teeth that reflect the fee for silver metal fillings. Contracts with the carrier almost always state that the benefit is for the least expensive service possible (alternative benefit clause). The insurance carrier is not telling you or the dentist what treatment you should have, only what their responsibility for payment is. The higher the premium, the more that is paid in benefits. The lower the premium, the lower the benefits. As a silly example, a very low cost dental insurance may pay 100% of the fee for a wooden denture. But that does not mean any dentist will carve you a set. If better materials are used based on the dentist's discretion, you are responsible for the difference.

In Conclusion

For your general health, we will not place cast based metals in your mouth. For the health and longevity of your teeth, we will not place new silver amalgam fillings in teeth with new decay or as a replacement for an existing restoration.

If you have any questions about silver amalgam and base metals, please feel free to ask us.