



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION INC.

dental health information

## THE TRUTH ABOUT MERCURY

### What are amalgam fillings made of?

Dental amalgam is an alloy of a number of metals, mainly silver, tin and mercury.

### Is it true that mercury leaks out of fillings?

Advances in testing equipment have enabled us to detect very small amounts of mercury released from fillings, especially when fillings are polished or removed.

### Is this mercury harmful?

Medical research organizations say that there is no scientific evidence that these tiny amounts of mercury released from dental fillings are a danger to health, apart from those rare cases where some individuals are unusually sensitive to this material. A number of overseas studies indicate there is no increased health risk or shortening of life between groups of people with amalgam fillings and those with none.

### Is it true that mercury is in our diet?

Yes. A normal balanced diet contains amounts of mercury and we also come into contact with it in our environment and in a number of other products. You get much more mercury from these sources than from your amalgam fillings.

### Can you be allergic to the mercury in amalgam?

This is extremely rare. Only 46 cases have been reported throughout the world since 1905. If you are worried, ask your doctor to refer you to a specialist for tests to check if you are allergic. If so, your dentist can use another type of filling for you.

### Is it true that some countries have banned amalgam?

No. A few European parliaments have tried to phase it out, largely for environmental reasons, but their health authorities have not 'banned' it. The World Health Organization says that it is safe to use.

### Should I have my dental amalgam fillings removed?

Unless you are one of those rare individuals who is particularly sensitive to dental amalgam, you will not improve your dental health by having these fillings replaced. Australia's specialist doctors and health authorities have warned the public that there is no justification for believing that this will cure a range of serious illnesses.

### Are amalgam fillings dangerous for pregnant women?

It is always sound practice to avoid any unnecessary dental treatment during pregnancy, including any dental fillings. Your dentist may be able to put off your treatment to a more suitable time.

If you already have amalgam fillings, there is no evidence that they can harm either you or your baby, if you are pregnant.

### Should amalgams be used for children's teeth?

Modern dentistry has largely eliminated amalgam as the treatment of choice for new fillings. The tooth-coloured materials usually used for children's fillings need much smaller cavities. Some health authorities have suggested that amalgam fillings should be avoided in favour of these newer fillings.