

MERCURY MADNESS

I doubt most people even know what it looks like and most people would be surprised to find out how prevalent mercury is in their surroundings, but everyone is scared of it. It has been shown to be a potent neurotoxin when ingested, inhaled, or even touched. The question in dentistry has always been whether the mercury in silver fillings (amalgam) is a health hazard.

Another recent study reported in the ADA News indicates that amalgam, if left undisturbed, poses no demonstrable health risk. Those vehemently against amalgam argue that's not true. But if you are using science to claim that amalgam is harmful, you have to trust that same science that has shown more conclusively it is not harmful. There is only one older (German) study, cited by those who oppose amalgam, that shows some correlation of amalgam to salivary mercury. Most agree that this study was flawed. When mercury is bound to the silver (as in amalgam), it is not released in any appreciable amounts, and the body apparently will not absorb it in that form.

That does not mean it cannot be harmful. Studies have shown that amalgam is most harmful when removed. If you are having silver fillings removed, your dentist should take some precautions (dental dam, diligent suction). If you do need any fillings replaced, it should be done discriminately. If you have been told that you need all of your fillings replaced, you should probably get a second opinion.

The whole issue should go away. Environmental concerns will likely be more of an issue. Very few dentists still use amalgam fillings and there isn't a good reason to use them at all. Composite (tooth-colored) fillings have been widely used for over twenty years and have been shown to be very durable, functional, and comfortable when properly placed. Other restoration options are also available.

Should you have all of your silver fillings replaced because they are "ugly"? That is up to you. At least that is a rational justification for replacing your fillings. As long as you are aware of potential complications, and precautions are taken for amalgam removal-- it's safer than liposuction.

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