



J. Peter St. Clair, DMD

Dentally Speaking

DENTAL AMALGAM

One of the more controversial subjects in dentistry today is the use of dental amalgam or “silver” fillings. I will not be able to address all of the issues regarding this subject in this short column. I will attempt to answer the major questions and hope to stimulate more questions which you can submit to me.

What is amalgam? The material has been used for over 150 years and contains various metals including silver, copper, tin and mercury. The materials are combined together to form a hard and stable dental restorative material.

Why is amalgam still used? The reasons include durability, longevity, cost-effectiveness and ability to withstand the intense pressures of chewing. The options for restoring back teeth today are limited to amalgam, gold and numerous tooth-colored materials. It is up to your dentist to inform you of the differences. Some

dentists offer all of these choices and others offer less.

If mercury is a toxic material, why isn't amalgam considered toxic? The bottom line is that the ADA, NIH, CDC and FDA all consider dental amalgam to be safe. Despite the fact that mercury vapor is released into the mouths of people who have amalgam fillings, the daily dose of mercury is not enough to cause concern with the organizations above. However, all dentists in state of Massachusetts, who either place or remove dental amalgam, were mandated by the state to install and register an amalgam separating unit. When the filter needs replacement, it is considered hazardous waste and must be disposed of through a licensed waste management company.

Can a dentist advise a patient to have amalgam removed for health/safety reasons? The FDA has concluded that amalgam fillings causes no demonstrated clinical harm to patients and that removing amalgam will not prevent adverse health effects or reverse the course of existing diseases. So, although a dentist can not legally advise you to remove amalgam fillings, he or she does have the right not to provide them as a service or require the use of certain techniques for their removal.

The Massachusetts Dental society encourages patients to discuss any questions or concerns about dental amalgam with their dentist so that informed decisions can be made.

If there are certain topics you would like to see written about or questions you have please email them to me at jpstclair@dentalhealthforlife.com .

