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## Brighter Smiles

### A COMPARISON OF MATERIALS

There are many different materials used to restore teeth. Although gold is still the standard to which all other materials are compared for longevity, it is used much less today due to newer tooth-colored materials. This column looks at some of the issues to consider with the two most common materials used to “fill” teeth – silver amalgam and tooth-colored composite resin. Future columns will discuss these materials in greater detail and compare them to other materials used less frequently.

#### **Silver Amalgam Filling Advantages**

Silver amalgam may have better long-term wear characteristics than tooth-colored resin fillings. However, newer filling materials are thought to be strongly competitive in this category.

An amalgam filling costs considerably less than a comparable composite filling.

#### **Silver Amalgam Filling Disadvantages**

Silver fillings are less attractive than tooth-colored composite resin fillings.

Silver amalgam fillings are 50% mercury.

The mercury in amalgam fillings expands and contracts with heat and cold (think of the mercury in a thermometer). This expansion is a known contributor of tooth fracture or “cracked tooth syndrome”.

Silver fillings will eventually corrode and leak, which can cause new decay to develop underneath the filling. The corrosion can also give a gray appearance to the entire tooth.

#### **Tooth-Colored Composite Resins Pros**

Resin fillings are more esthetic and look more like teeth.

The resin compound actually chemically bonds to your tooth. This makes the tooth stronger than those restored with amalgam.

Composite resin fillings can also be made much smaller than an amalgam filling used to restore the same amount of decayed tooth, so less natural tooth structure is lost.

#### **Tooth-Colored Composite Resins Cons**

Continual improvements in the materials have made resins nearly as durable as amalgam fillings.

These restorations fail just like any other over time. However, they are not responsible for cracking teeth. They fail due to wear and breakdown of marginal integrity.

Tooth-colored fillings cost considerably more than silver fillings due to material

costs and the time it takes to do. Insurance companies often do not cover the additional cost of doing these materials.

#### **Which to choose?**

This is a decision between you and your dentist. Many dentists do not even offer silver fillings any more, mainly do the controversy over the mercury in them.

This column is meant to be an introduction into some of the facts we as dentists use in consideration between these two materials. Although there are other things to consider, the items discussed above will allow you to make a more informed decision on which material you feel is best for you.

Dr. St. Clair maintains a private dental practice in Rowley and Newburyport dedicated to health-centered family dentistry. If there are certain topics you would like to see written about or questions you have please email them to him at [jpstclair@dentalhealthforlife.com](mailto:jpstclair@dentalhealthforlife.com). You can view all previously written columns at [www.dentalhealthforlife.com](http://www.dentalhealthforlife.com).

