

Choosing Wisely®

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Dental fillings that contain mercury

Removing them is a bad idea

Many of us have silver fillings or reconstruction in some of our teeth. The material used is called “amalgam.” It contains mercury and other metals, such as zinc, tin, copper, or silver. Dentists have used these amalgams for nearly 200 years. Some people think they are dangerous because of the mercury.

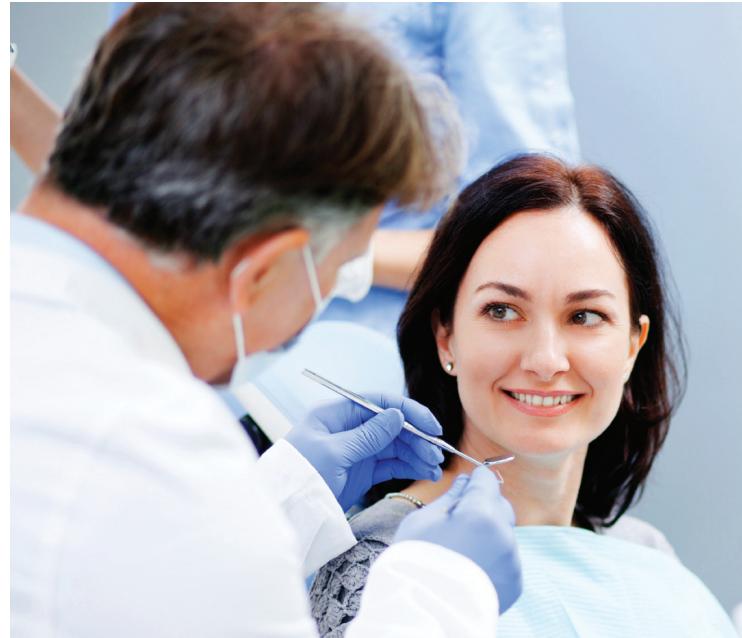
In recent years, many dentists have been replacing fillings that contain mercury. But replacing them isn’t necessary. Here’s why:

Studies do not show any dangers from fillings with mercury.

Dental fillings have very small amounts of mercury. The amount of mercury that might leak out of the filling is not dangerous. It causes no harm, except for very rare allergic reactions. You get much more mercury from eating certain seafoods (see Advice column).

Replacing fillings can harm teeth.

The heavy drilling to remove and replace fillings can weaken teeth. Then you may need other dental work, like crowns or caps.



To replace several fillings, your dentist might use a general anesthetic. This has a small risk.

It can cost a lot to replace fillings.

A basic filling can cost \$80 to \$220 or more. To repair fillings can cost \$400 or more. If a crown is needed, that costs about \$850. It can cost thousands of dollars to replace all your fillings.

So, when should fillings with mercury in them be removed?

It is simple. Don't replace them only because they contain mercury. It's fine to replace them if you need another dental procedure.

What if I do need a filling replaced?

Removing a filling releases more mercury than leaving the filling alone. But it is not dangerous. If you need to have a filling removed because you need other dental work, don't worry.

Many dentists will use amalgams made from resin composite, glass ionomer, porcelain, or gold alloys. None of these contain mercury. Some dentists still use mercury-containing amalgams, especially in back teeth. You can ask for another kind if you prefer.

Advice from Consumer Reports

Better ways to protect yourself from mercury

You do not need to worry about the mercury in your fillings. But you should try to limit the amount of mercury in your diet and your family's diet.

Limit canned tuna.

Consumer Reports recommends these weekly limits of tuna:

- Children under 45 pounds (lbs):
 - 4 ounces (oz) light tuna
 - Or 1.5 oz white tuna
- Children over 45 lbs:
 - 12.5 oz light tuna
 - Or 4 oz white tuna
- Women of childbearing age:
 - 12.5 oz light tuna
 - Or 4 oz white tuna—but lower-mercury fish is better, especially for women trying to get pregnant or nursing
- Pregnant women:
 - Avoid tuna completely
- Men and older women:
 - 14.5 oz light tuna
 - Or 5 oz white tuna



Young children and women of childbearing age.

Mercury is more dangerous if you are in these groups. It is important to limit tuna. And you should not eat any:

- Tilefish from the Gulf of Mexico
- King mackerel
- Shark
- Swordfish

Eat fish lower in mercury.

The following fish are lower in mercury and are fine to eat. But check local fish advisories, especially if you go fishing.

- Wild or canned Alaskan salmon
- Sardines, tilapia, pollock, flounder, sole, haddock, and Atlantic mackerel
- Crabs and common shellfish, such as shrimp, clams, scallops, oysters, and squid (calamari)

This report is for you to use when talking with your health-care provider. It is not a substitute for medical advice and treatment. Use of this report is at your own risk.

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