

## Dental Fillings

Many patients who have had dental fillings worry about the risk of mercury exposure. There are consumer advocacy groups who believe that there is a link between mercury fillings and multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's Disease and chronic-fatigue syndrome. Should these patients be concerned? Are these advocacy groups correct?

Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) panel rejected (by a vote of 13 to 7) a report which suggested mercury fillings are safe. The FDA did not say that the report was incorrect; it merely felt the report was incomplete, making it impossible to reach a definitive conclusion about the safety of mercury fillings.

The average North American has 7 or 8 fillings; mercury is released from these fillings. According to a recent article in the medical section of the Wall Street Journal, a World Health Organization report tells us that 7 fillings will release one microgram of mercury daily. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, we also absorb 5 to 6 micrograms of mercury daily from food and water sources.

Alternatives to mercury fillings are gold, resin composites and ceramic. They all have their own pros and cons:

- Gold is durable, but expensive.
- Composites are costly and white (blending well with the teeth's natural color), but they are also less durable.
- Ceramic fillings are attractive, expensive and time consuming.

Obviously, prevention is better than a cure; it would be nice to not need fillings in the first place. In fact, fluoride in water and toothpaste has significantly contributed to a reduction in dental cavities.

A few years ago, I wrote about the pros and cons of fluoride in my monthly article for the Calgary Herald. I have had the privilege to write these monthly columns for almost ten years so far, yet my article on fluoride caused the biggest response from readers, including a few doctors who oppose fluoride (To access this article, *The Uses and Abuses of Fluoride*, please visit the "Archive" found in the "Monthly Featured Article" section of HealthyKids).

Personally, I would prefer less of any chemical substance in my body. In the end, I would choose composite resin fillings for myself and my children.

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