



DENTAL AMALGAM FACTS

What is dental amalgam?

Most people recognize dental amalgams as silver fillings. Dental amalgam is a mixture of mercury, and an alloy of silver, tin and copper. Mercury makes up about 45-50 percent of the compound. Mercury is used to bind the metals together and to provide a strong, hard durable filling. After years of research, mercury has been found to be the only element that will bind these metals together in such a way that can be easily manipulated into a tooth cavity. The small squeaking sound that you hear when an amalgam filling is being placed is the squeezing of the mixture, which expresses the excess mercury from the filling. This excess mercury is discarded and only small amounts are left bound to the other metals.

Is mercury in dental amalgam safe?

The safety of dental amalgams has been reviewed extensively over the past ten years. When mercury is combined with other materials in dental amalgam, its chemical nature changes, so it is essentially harmless. The amount released in the mouth under the pressure of chewing and grinding is extremely small and no cause for alarm. In fact, it is less than what patients are exposed to in food, air, and water. Ongoing scientific studies conducted over the past 100 years continue to prove that amalgam is not harmful.

Why do dentists use dental amalgams?

Dental amalgam has withstood the test of time, which is why it is the material of choice. It has a 150-year proven track record and is still one of the safest, durable and least expensive materials to a fill a cavity. It is estimated that more than 1 billion amalgam restorations (fillings) are placed annually. Dentists use dental amalgams because they have greater longevity and are less costly to place.

What are the alternatives to amalgam?

There are alternatives to amalgam, such as cast gold restorations, porcelain, and composite resins. These alternative materials are more costly. Gold and porcelain restorations take longer to make and require two appointments. Composite resins, or white fillings, are esthetically appealing, but may not be as durable as amalgam.

What about my esthetic concerns?

The decision about which material to choose for your filling is a personal one and should be discussed with your dentist. Dental amalgam is the preferred restorative material for posterior (back) teeth. For anterior (front) teeth composite resin (white filling) is the preferred restorative material. Scientific evidence continues to support amalgam restorations as being the strongest.

Therefore, since amalgam is the preferred material with the greatest strength and durability Delta Dental Plan will continue to benefit only amalgam on multi-surface posterior restorations. We will also benefit composite (white) material on anterior (front) teeth, and as single surface only restorations on back teeth. If the member decides to have composite (white) materials used on posterior teeth for multi-surface fillings, then they will be responsible for the price difference between the allowed Delta Dental Plan amalgam benefit and the chosen composite material alternative.