

Choosing Wisely[®]

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Dental fillings that contain mercury

Removing them is a bad idea

Most adults have fillings or other dental work in some of our teeth. Often this dental work uses a material called “amalgam.” It contains mercury and other metals, such as zinc, tin, copper, or silver.

Dentists have used amalgams for nearly 200 years. Some people think they are dangerous because of the mercury, but studies do not show that this is true.

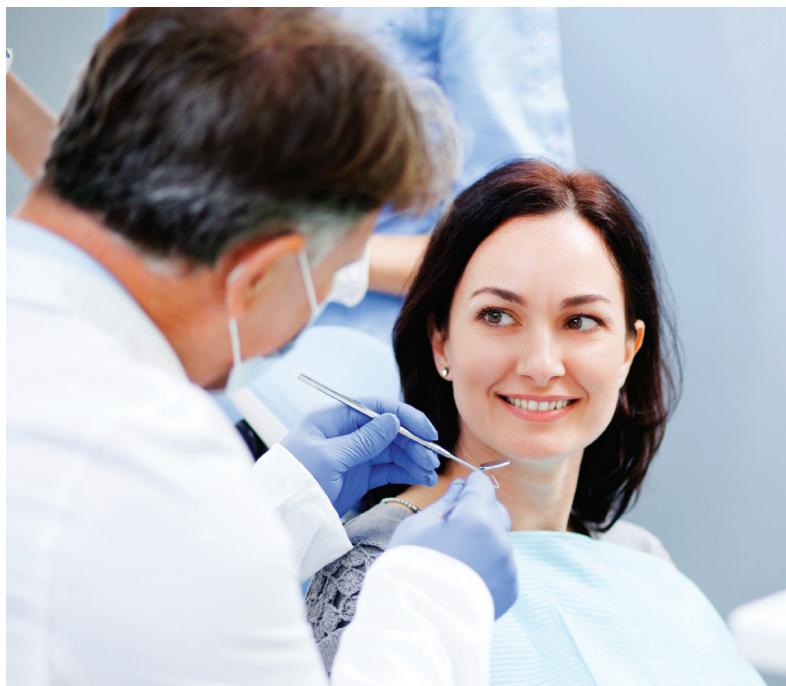
In recent years, many dentists have been replacing fillings that contain some mercury. But replacing them isn't necessary. Here's why:

Studies do not show any dangers from fillings with mercury.

Amalgam dental fillings have very small amounts of mercury. The amount of mercury that might leak out is not dangerous. It causes no harm, except for very rare allergic reactions. You get much more mercury from eating certain seafoods (see “Advice from Consumer Reports,” on the next page).

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 more than \$200. If a crown is needed, it can cost \$1,000 or more. It can cost thousands of dollars to replace all your fillings.

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

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.

Dentists use materials called restorations to restore teeth. Many dentists will use restorations 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. Consumer Reports recommends eating low-mercury fish and avoiding high-mercury fish. If you eat more than 1.5 pounds of fish per week, choose from our low- and lowest-mercury lists.

Lowest-mercury fish: oysters, wild-caught salmon (including canned) from Alaska, sardines, scallops, shrimp, squid, and tilapia.

- A 132-pound woman can safely eat up to 36 ounces per week; a 44-pound child can safely eat up to 18 ounces.



Low-mercury fish: Atlantic croaker, Atlantic mackerel, catfish, crab, crawfish, flatfish (flounder and sole), haddock, mullet, pollock, and trout.

- A 132-pound woman can safely eat up to 18 ounces per week; a 44-pound child can safely eat up to 6 ounces.

Fish to avoid: bigeye tuna (often used in sushi), Gulf tilefish, king mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, shark, and swordfish.

- These fish are too high in mercury to be safe for women of childbearing age, those who are pregnant or breastfeeding, and young children.

Limit canned tuna: Although light tuna usually contains less mercury than albacore tuna, Consumer Reports' testing showed high levels of mercury in many types of canned tuna.

- Pregnant women should not eat any tuna. Other women and children can have light tuna in moderation, but should not eat any other fish that week to avoid getting too much mercury. Because eating tuna limits how much other fish you can eat that week, we think it's smart to avoid tuna altogether so you can eat more lower-mercury fish.
 - About 3½ ounces of light tuna per week for a 44-pound child
 - About 11½ ounces per week for a 132-pound woman

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

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