

Smiles Better

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The HEALTH RISKS of fillings

Do you ever go to the dentist and they start asking you questions, and before you can answer they have their mirror and probe stuck in your mouth?

I'd say most of us at some point have been guilty of this!! But I love to listen to patients and hear their stories about their daughter's graduation or their son's wedding, they're planning their outfits and making sure they look good for the all important family portrait.

After the big event we all look forward to seeing the pictures, even the unflattering ones where you have been caught laughing with your mouth wide open, but its then patients return to see me telling me that they never noticed they're teeth were grey or they had so many metal fillings.

People sometimes think that if a filling is at the back of the mouth it can't been seen, but as the saying goes...the camera never lies!



When patients do decide to have their metal fillings replaced they usually have done a bit of research and can become very worried about the health risks of having metal fillings. The topic of 'how safe' amalgam (metal) fillings are is one that I'm sure many of you are aware. At present the Department of Health state that amalgam fillings containing mercury pose no danger, but many campaigners blame the highly toxic mercury found in amalgam fillings for a range of ailments including depression, heart conditions, fatigue and Alzheimer's disease. When working on the NHS dentists are restricted and only metal



(amalgam) fillings can be used to fill the biting surfaces of back teeth. We can therefore only offer white fillings in this area of the mouth privately (not on the NHS).

So what are your options for White Fillings?

When most people talk about 'white' fillings it usually refers to a Composite fillings. They are a type of synthetic resin material that bonds to the tooth surface, it comes in different shades so we can match it to your own tooth colour and it can be easily polished to make it look and feel like your own tooth. Composite materials have come along way and they're are now as strong and long lasting as metal fillings. The only draw back is that they are best suited for small to medium cavities, once you have a lot of tooth loss you need to look at Porcelain fillings (inlays and onlays)

There are two main methods of placing porcelain fillings. You can have an impression of the tooth taken which is sent to the lab technician and they



make the filling and send it back in about 2 weeks, or you can have a Cerec 3D. The Cerec 3D system allows the dentist to take a digital image of your tooth using CAD-CAM technology and the filling is then processed in a milling machine and is ready in approximately 20 minutes, so you can go home with the filling that day! I find patients are amazed watching the Cerec 3D being designed and they then can see the milling machine where their unique Cerec 3D filling is being made.

So you've decided you want to remove your old NHS metal fillings and you've decided white type of white filling you would like to replace it with... now what?

Evidence and research had shown that when removing metal fillings small amounts of mercury vapour may be released. As a precaution most dentists use a few or all of the following guidelines for safe amalgam filling removal:

Keep fillings cool during removal by using water and air from hand-piece Cut the amalgam into sections which means less drilling Use high volume evacuator- plenty of suction Rubber

dam- this isolates the teeth so the rest of the mouth does not come into contact with any water or amalgam, not all patients like this though so it is down to personal choice. Also some evidence suggests that getting patients to breath through nose rather that mouth is much more beneficial Use activated charcoal- Some evidence shows that if charcoal is taken 5-10 minutes before amalgam removal can bind to smaller particles of swallowed mercury, allowing them to be harmlessly passed out of the intestine via the faeces.

If you are worried about the health drawbacks of having metal fillings speak to your dentist about your concerns and they will happily give you the best treatment options to suit your needs.

