

COMMON QUESTIONS

Dear Dr. McCrummen, I recently moved here and had asked for my X-rays from my previous dental office. They said they would send copies to my future dentist. I wanted the original ones, not copies, but they said they couldn't give them to me. I paid for them so why can't I have them? Also, they said if I wanted copies for myself I would have to pay for them? Why do I have to pay twice? M.C.

It is true that the dentist must keep the original x-rays in their office until after the patient has died. Diagnoses, treatment, charting, health history, and your x-rays from which treatment and diagnosis came from, all must stay in your folder and are the property of the office. Copies needed for future treatment or comparisons can be made, and are completely acceptable and expected.

The fee you paid was for the procedure, sterilization, the room setup, the use of the equipment and supplies, the skills and wages of the operator, and the diagnosis from the dentist. If you request copies be sent to another dental office there is usually no charge to you. However, if you are requesting extra copies for yourself a fee may be charged for a trained staff member to take the time, and use supplies, chemicals, and special equipment and dark room to copy, develop, and mount the x-rays. Each office has their own policy but a fee is usual and customary.

Most of the time, the new dentist will need current x-rays, a copy of your last complete set (around 18 pictures), and the last *panoramic* x-ray. It is generally not good to release copies to a patient that is moving, as they often get lost or damaged in the move. It is best to have your new dental office request the pertinent x-rays prior to your first visit. Ask your office what their policy is.

Dear Dr. McCrummen, I was told I have leaking fillings and that they need to be replaced. What in the world is a leaking filling? They don't hurt so why replace them? A.L.C.

Most likely your dentist is referring to old silver fillings. Tooth decay originally occurred because bacteria got through the hard enamel barrier. Those bacteria were digesting the inside of your tooth like you digest food. When the decay and bacteria were removed something had to be put in the hole to keep more bacteria out.

Liquid metal (a soft silver and mercury mixture called *amalgam*) was packed into the tooth to fill the hole. The metal does not stick to the tooth, but forms a tight seal after it hardens. Hot food and drink made the metal swell. Cold things made the metal shrink. Chewing forces up to 40,000 pounds per square inch made the metal change shape. Years of these stresses cause the metal to lose its seal or crack and bacteria "leak" past the filling causing more decay.

Spaces can often be seen around fillings, with our high power optics, and color-changes within the tooth mean corrosion, stain, and usually decay. Your dentist will remove the filling and decay, and may place a permanent medicine, another metal filling, a tooth colored bonded filling, an inlay, onlay, or crown, depending on what is needed and what you desire.

X-rays do not show these areas very well so we often find deep problems under old fillings. Follow your doctor's advice and have leaking fillings replaced soon, *before* they hurt. Pain means the nerves are affected. Early treatment can save you money by reducing the possibility of needing root canal therapy, a filling, and a crown, or worse, the loss of an important tooth.