

METAL CONCERNS and CHINESE CROWNS

I have received many recent questions about metal concerns in the mouth, and the recent scare of crowns made in foreign countries. The U.S. has stringent FDA rules about what can be put in the body; most other countries do not.

Silver fillings (amalgams) have been used for over 100 years and are now mainly used in 3rd world countries, countries with national health-care, inner-city and poverty areas, and offered as a cheap option. It is quicker, easier to use, and cheaper for the dentist than the latest tooth colored bonded resin types now mainly used. They are still considered safe, but there are many benefits to the bonded non-metal replacement that I cannot go into technically.

American amalgam ingredients have been mainly silver, sometimes a little copper and zinc and mercury. Mercury is the catalyst to make the filling harden. It is incorporated in the metal and bound to the components in a short time (minutes). They do not dissolve or leach mercury into anyone's system and are still considered safe. There is no medical group or society (cancer, diabetic, M.S., Alzheimer, etc.) that recommends against its use or advises replacement to prevent or cure any ailment. If there is a sensitivity or allergic reaction it is rare and usually seen as inflammation at an area of contact with gum tissue. Foreign silver filling ingredients may include lead, as many I have replaced have been very soft and worn down, unlike North American fillings, but I have not tested the residue for components to know for sure. It may be that more mercury is used that makes them softer since their components and quantities are not regulated.

Mercury filling scares are fictional/myth and based on assumption, not reality. Major, well-funded national and worldwide studies find dental amalgam is safe, but it is well-known that pollution and background mercury is a problem, from the air and water near industrial areas, and from naturally present mercury in the soil getting into our water and fish. Flathead Lake-trout have shown very high levels of mercury (the larger the fish the more mercury), as have many types of seafood. Be aware of what type of fish to avoid, especially if a pregnancy is planned or occurs; as examples, shark, swordfish, and some tuna can have high levels of mercury. People with metal fillings in all their teeth have been found to have no greater mercury levels than those with no fillings.

Scandinavia has recently stopped using mercury fillings, not due to patient health concerns, but to protect the environment, especially since their economy is based on seafood. If anyone has a concern about working with mercury it is the dentist and staff that are exposed to its vapor daily, not the patients. I personally feel there are better choices than silver fillings and choose not to use it at all, but it still has its place and is acceptable. Many insurance companies will only pay towards the cost of cheaper silver filling to save the company money, especially HMO's and preferred provider programs (PPO's).

Crowns and bridges are best made out of gold where esthetics is not a concern, as gold is the most bio-compatible material, is strong, durable, cannot chip or crack like porcelain, wears like natural teeth, and organisms do not grow on it. Typical U.S crowns (all-metal and porcelain covered) are composed of gold, silver, platinum, and/or palladium. Cheaper crowns can contain nickel, which

many people are allergic to (estimated >70% of women are, due to childhood exposure to costume jewelry).

It is estimated 10-15% of dental restorations sold in the U.S are produced in foreign countries, such as China and Mexico. These materials are not FDA approved. U.S. dental Laboratories must disclose if foreign countries have participated in the fabrication of their products. If you are concerned ask your dental office for a statement or proof from the lab. I have used the same American Certified dental laboratory for over 23 years, and know the lab technicians and owner personally, and receive their guarantee with each case.

If someone wants a cheap crown and a dentist is using a cheap lab to save money, it is possible the crowns are outsourced, without the knowledge of your dentist. Searching for cheaper prices in healthcare can lead to cheaper quality and multiple dental visits, at the expense of your health and comfort, as well as additional time and cost to correct problems.

The recent China scare was related to lead found in porcelain crowns. Crystal glass is known to have high lead content for clarity. The porcelain (glass) used in crowns from foreign countries may have high lead content; cheap porcelain veneers or crowns/bridges can be toxic. The FDA has rules on contents so it is safer to stick with U.S. made products. Some foreign porcelain contains radioactive material to make it fluoresce which is not allowed in the U.S. Also, some other toxic metals are used freely in other countries that are not allowed here. No modern, FDA approved, U.S dental materials have been known to contribute to any disease.