

## REPLACEMENT OF SILVER FILLINGS

There continues to be a great deal of debate as to whether silver fillings are bad for your teeth or not. In some countries, the usage of silver fillings has been banned due to the fact that mercury forms part of the silver filling. There is insufficient research to date that shows a relationship between health issues due to mercury accumulation in the brain and the presence of silver fillings. We do know that mercury vapour is present in a mouth which contains silver fillings, but we do not know if there are sufficient levels to induce brain disease.

We do know that in order for a silver filling to be locked in to a tooth, there needs to be additional healthy tooth structure removed for the fit of the silver filling, as silver fillings are press fit. The greater the tooth reduction, the more likely the chance of fracturing as the remaining tooth gets weaker. White fillings are bonded to the tooth, so the preparations are much more conservative, and the remaining tooth is in a stronger position. In addition, because the white fillings are chemically “glued” to the tooth, they help to hold the tooth together. Silver fillings offer no protection if a piece of tooth is inclined to breaking off. When a tooth breaks, there may be enough structure remaining to place a new filling. However, there may be only enough left that a crown may be necessary. In addition, if the fracture involves the nerve, a root canal also may be necessary. Replacing a silver filling with a white filling gives added protection against fracturing.

All materials expand when heated and cooled. Both silver fillings and white fillings expand and contract. White fillings are bonded so there is less likelihood in a tooth breaking away from the expansion, whereas the silver fillings are not bonded so the expansion is more likely to remove a piece of tooth. Many teeth with either filling material never fracture at all. However some teeth may fracture so extensively that the tooth needs to be extracted because there is inadequate tooth structure remaining to rebuild upon.

When replacing a silver filling, the filling is carefully removed, with no additional tooth structure. Only if there is a cavity around or under the filling is additional tooth structure removed. The white filling is then bonded into place, contoured, and polished. Any time work is done on a tooth, the tooth responds with inflammation. If the inflammation is strong enough, sensitivity develops. The closer the filling is to the nerve, the greater the chance of sensitivity. If sensitivity continues after replacement of silver fillings, root canal procedures may be warranted to remove the source of pain. Our patient surveys indicate that over 90% of replaced fillings gave no sensitivity, 9.8% said mild hot and cold sensitivity lasted for 2 – 4 weeks, and 0.2% that required root canal therapy. That’s about 1 out of 500, and notably those were on teeth with very deep silver fillings to begin with.

It is impossible to see cracks with silver fillings unless they are obvious. Approximately 20 % of silver filling replacements show visible cracks that were not obvious clinically until the procedure was done. In addition, approximately 10% of silver replacements have cavities around them which also could not be identified clinically or on x-rays. Obvious signs of filling failure include marginal breakdown (when a gap forms between the tooth and the filling), and broken pieces of missing tooth or filling material.

Replacing your silver fillings with white fillings is a preventative treatment. It is not mandatory. White fillings are much more natural looking than silver fillings, and do lessen the chance of tooth breakage and tooth loss.

I have read this information sheet on silver filling replacement. I know I have the choice to leave my silver fillings alone, or to be proactive and have them replaced. Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ has made it clear to me whether my fillings are showing signs of breakdown and need to be replaced, or whether they are in good condition and replacement would be preventative only. I understand the benefits and risks of replacing my silver fillings. I have had an opportunity to ask Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ any questions I have related to my treatment, and I am satisfied with the answers.

I hereby offer my consent to the replacement of the following silver fillings:

\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_