

# Profiting from Fear (of Dental Amalgams)

*By ACSH Staff — August 15, 2005*

The misguided anti-amalgam movement has been given new life by the widespread but bogus claims associating mercury with autism. Amalgams are dental fillings made of mercury, silver, and other metals. They have been used over a century and a half; millions, perhaps billions have been placed in patient's mouths, and no valid evidence has ever been unearthed of harm to anyone. But health frauds and quacks continue their assault on the public, and misinformation spreads. Sad to relate, there are dentists willing to exploit these unfounded fears.

The facts of the matter are clear: amalgam fillings are safe, and amalgam, properly used, is the most practical, durable, and long-lasting filling material for the back teeth. The anti-amalgamists claim that considerable mercury from these fillings leaches out into the mouth, causing harm. Obviously, were that true amalgams would not last as long as they do (I still have an amalgam in my mouth that my father placed nearly sixty-five years ago!).

Nicholas Davis, DDS, president of the American Academy of Cosmetic Dentistry, was recently quoted as saying that if he were at risk for infection (aren't we all?), he would want to "boost my immune system" by "purging all metals from my mouth." Statements like this produce the erroneous implication that amalgams somehow impair the immune system. He also said that amalgams were popular because they were so easy to use: "We can put it in the mouth when the mouth is wet, and it doesn't take an advanced technique." But amalgams must be placed in a dry field maintained by cotton rolls or rubber dam. An amalgam placed in a saliva-contaminated field is less likely to succeed. This dentist, like many others, offers his patients removal and replacement of amalgams, one quarter of the mouth at a time. "Over time, your whole mouth will be upgraded," he says. But the removal of sound fillings and their replacement with inferior material is not an upgrade.

The American Dental Association (ADA) affirms the safety of amalgam. So do major dental organizations worldwide. But the ill-advised opposition maintains that the ADA has a "vested economic interest" in amalgams. The slightest reflection should show how foolish this is. Practicing dentists, from an economic point of view, would welcome any proof that amalgams were harmful. This would enable them to greatly profit by removing amalgams and making more expensive replacements. Integrity prevents dentists from doing this -- but, evidently, not every dentist.

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