

Metal in Your Mouth

The commonly used silver and amalgam dental fillings contain mercury—lots of it.

Question. My dentist told me that several silver fillings in my mouth are not harmful. Can you please comment?

J.R., Bozeman, Montana

Answer. This is a highly disputed subject because levels of mercury exposure vary from person to person. Fillings made from amalgam—an alloy of mercury and silver—are approximately 50 percent mercury.

The amount of mercury absorbed depends, however, on the number and type of fillings an individual has and his or her dietary practices. Simply brushing the teeth, grinding the teeth, chewing gum or drinking hot liquids causes the release of significant amounts of mercury vapor from fillings.

This is important because mercury is one of the most toxic elements on the planet. It accumulates in the liver, kidneys, thyroid, GI tract, brain, pituitary and adrenal glands, and other tissues.

All dentists are required to put silver amalgams in an enclosed biohazard container after extracting them. Also, the silver used in fillings over the last 20 years or so is high in copper and releases many times more mercury than the older style of amalgam fillings. Thanks to improved technology, we today have newer materials that can be used in place of toxic elements.

I recommend that you not place silver or amalgam fillings in

your mouth or your children's mouths. Instead, ask your dentist for the safer, alternative compounds. If you already have silver fillings, I suggest you consult with a biological dentist for further advice. You can locate a biological dentist in your area by contacting the International Academy of Oral Medicine & Toxicology at or the International College of Integrative Medicine at www.iaomt.org or www.ici-int.org.

It is also important to know that we are exposed to mercury through food, specifically fish. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, more than half the fish in America's lakes and reservoirs contain mercury levels that exceed the government's standards for children and for women of child-bearing ages. Saltwater fish known to have high levels of mercury include shark, swordfish and king mackerel.

I recommend eating fish no more than twice a week. My patients take five Chlorella capsules or tablets after eating fish. Chlorella is a form of algae that binds to mercury and enables the body to excrete it. For more information, see my book *What You Don't Know May Be Killing You!* (Siloam).

Question. I have heard that chocolate is good for you. Is this true? I must confess that I am skeptical.

M.G., Burlington, Vermont

Answer. Years ago I would have said that this was a rumor started by my wife. She believes the four main food groups are chocolate, chocolate, chocolate and chocolate. However, numerous studies conclude that one form of this beloved treat is actually good for you.

One such study, conducted in Greece, involved 17 volunteers

who ate 100 grams of either dark chocolate or a nonchocolate substitute—the equivalent of about two standard-sized Hershey's chocolate bars. The dark chocolate improved the blood-vessel function in healthy young adults for at least three hours. Specifically, it helped the vessels to dilate, which will slow the formation of clots.

Dark chocolate is high in flavonoids, an antioxidant that protects the heart and blood vessels from damage by free radicals. Plain dark chocolate can increase levels of antioxidants in the blood by about 20 percent. Milk chocolate does not have this same effect. Dark chocolate also lowers high blood pressure, according to a report published in the Journal of the American Medical Association in August.

If you eat chocolate, then choose the dark. Remember too that a primary ingredient, usually added liberally, is sugar, a substance that causes more health problems than chocolate can ever protect you from. So, before you rush to tear open a candy bar, look for a dark chocolate with low sugar and low milk content. And eat it only in moderation—not every three hours!

Donald Colbert, M.D., is a family physician and nutrition expert. His books are available from Siloam at or at . Send questions to Doctor's Orders, 600 Rinehart Road, Lake Mary, FL 32746. Before taking any nutritional supplement, consult your doctor.