

Metal Free Dentistry-the New Revolution

Remember the old phrase “metal mouth”? It was a derogatory term kids used when name calling and bullying other kids with braces. Well, braces are often a status symbol for teenagers now, but most adults, many who are seeking straighter teeth, have no desire for their smile to be covered with wire and brackets. And how many times have you seen someone, in real life or on television, open their mouth and show back teeth with bright gold crowns or dark, black metal fillings? Ever see someone, maybe even in the mirror, with a “tooth colored” crown in the front, but it is black at the gum line? There are now great ways to get around all these issues. In fact, many of the newest innovations in modern dental practices involve using materials that do not contain metal.

There is actually some controversy over using the old “silver” filling materials. While the American Dental Association (ADA) stands by the material as a safe and economical way of restoring decay, being used since the 7th century in China and since the early 1800’s in the US, some people are concerned with the fact that the material contains a large amount of mercury, a known toxic substance. The ADA contends that the small amount of mercury and mercury vapor that seep from these fillings with wear is negligible and not harmful. Others claim it does cause harm to varying degrees. One thing is certain: there are now stronger, more esthetic alternatives to the old amalgam fillings.

Tooth colored fillings, also called composite resins, are a mixture of a plastic resin and small glass particles. Silver filling material is rather weak and requires removal of a lot of tooth to make the filling strong enough. Resin fillings only require the removal of decay, and are thus much less invasive. Cavities that are caught early enough can often be repaired without numbing at

all. Silver also doesn't attach to the tooth; it simply fills in the hole. Over time, silver expands slightly and can actually break apart a tooth from the inside. Resin restorations actually bond to the tooth and reinforce it. They are also the aesthetic choice, matching the natural color of your teeth.

Crowns and bridges can also be done without dark metal underneath. This gives a natural translucency and does away with the dark line at the gums. These restorations can either be purely made from porcelain or made with an underlying "shell" of zirconium, the same material artificial diamonds are made from, in areas that need extra strength. Restorations of these types are much more lifelike and beautiful than the metal versions, which can often appear dull or fake. We use these metal free materials in our "Extreme Makeover" type cases with amazing results!

Even straightening your teeth with braces, the classic "metal mouth" scenario, has a metal free alternative. Invisalign is a way of straightening teeth without brackets or wires at all. Impressions are taken of your mouth and a series of clear, thin shells that fit over your teeth are created. Each "aligner" has the teeth positioned a little closer to ideal, so as you progress through the series, your teeth are slowly moved into a better position. While in the mouth, they are almost completely invisible. No one has to even know you are straightening your teeth. There are limits to what types of problems can be fixed, so not everyone is a candidate, but it is a great alternative to traditional braces.

Doing these types of restorations and enhancements correctly requires special training, so you need to inquire as to what training your dental professional has had. Always ask to see a before and after book of photos before turning your smile over to be restored. You may choose to do metal free dentistry just for your future needs or choose to replace existing metal restorations with something new and improved. Ask your dentist what is right for

you to achieve that beautiful, healthy smile you have always wanted.