

## I was poisoned by mercury fillings

Sweden and Austria have banned traditional amalgam fillings and in the UK dentists are divided over whether they are safe. ADRIAN LEE talks to one man who believes they ruined his health

**W**HEN Bryan Tootal began suffering unexplained dizzy spells and blackouts, a host of medical experts were left scratching their heads. It was suspected, wrongly, that he had suffered a stroke or had brain disease. As his health continued to decline, the circulation disorder Raynaud's disease was also a contender.

Mr Bryan, now 69, a retired shopkeeper who had previously been fit and active, the failure to pinpoint the cause of his debilitating symptoms was devastating. He feared he could be experiencing the first signs of multiple sclerosis. "My memory was poor and I was constantly falling down," he recalls. "It seemed that I had every test in the book but no one could tell me what was wrong. I was going downhill at a rapid rate."

In the diary in which he recorded his turmoil, Bryan noted down a strange taste in his mouth: "I now wonder if it's mercury poisoning from very old fillings in the back of my teeth. Am I clutching at straws?" he wrote. Months later he acted on his hunch and a test showed high levels of toxicity. He began taking antioxidants to cleanse his body, along with Humet-R, a natural detoxifier which removes heavy metals from the body. Four fillings, made from amalgam containing up to 50 per cent mercury, were also removed. "My mind became much clearer within a week," says Bryan, from Chatteris, Cambridgeshire. "The dizziness and muscle spasms stopped. I began to get my life back."

Bryan and his wife Pam have no doubt that mercury was to blame for his illness. Bryan's dentist was sufficiently impressed by his response to the treatment that he began using alternative "white fillings" made from powdered glass bonded with plastic.

Countries such as Sweden and Austria have banned the use of mercury fillings. In the UK the British Dental Association (BDA) does not recommend they are used in the teeth of pregnant women but insists that mercury, which has been used by dentists for 150 years, is "perfectly safe". It accepts that a small number of people are sensitive to the heavy metal.

It is an issue which divides the dental profession. More than 500 private practices are now mercury free but NHS dentists will normally only provide white fillings for cosmetic reasons, on front teeth. They are more expensive as they take up to 10 times longer to place.

Dr David Harvie-Austin, a dentist who stopped using mercury 25 years ago, says: "Mercury is a recognised poison and I would certainly not put it in anyone's mouth. Some people tolerate mercury with no apparent symptoms but I do see many patients who have had problems. In no other part of the



Picture: MARIA PLATT-EVANS

SYMPTOMS: Bryan Tootal, with wife Pam, had high levels of toxicity

body is a poison used as a medical treatment."

He believes GPs should be more aware that up to three per cent of the population will react badly to mercury fillings. "I'm not suggesting that everyone should panic and have mercury fillings removed but if there are unexplained symptoms it is worth considering."

**A** SIMPLE blood test exists to establish mercury sensitivity, adds Dr Harvie-Austin, who is chairman of the British Society For Mercury Free Dentistry.

Mercury, which is released from fillings in vapour form by chewing or grinding teeth, can be stored in body cells for many years, so the detoxification process can be lengthy, he says.

Seven years after his fillings were removed, Bryan says he still has problems with his balance and continues with treatment. His five grown-up children have all had their mercury fillings removed.

Older fillings contained up to 75 per cent mercury, mixed with copper, tin, silver and zinc. About five million mercury fillings are used every year to treat tooth decay. Mercury has been linked to diseases including Parkinson's and multiple sclerosis but critics claim the studies are not reliable. Research on children who have

mercury fillings showed their IQ, kidney, brain and memory function were no worse than young patients with white fillings.

A Department of Health spokeswoman says there are no plans to phase out the use of mercury by Britain's 21,000 NHS dentists. "Independent research has shown that there is no valid scientific evidence that dental amalgam is toxic to patients, except in the rare case of allergy," she says.

"Experts agree that it is the most convenient and durable material for filling cavities in back teeth. If there are clinical reasons why mercury-free fillings should be used then they are available on the NHS."

The BDA says it bases its stance on guidance from independent toxicity experts who have concluded that mercury in fillings causes no significant risk. Countries which have banned mercury amalgam have done so for environmental, not health reasons, it claims.

A spokesman says: "Sensitivity to amalgam is extremely rare but if patients are concerned they are affected they are able to consult their GP for a test. Millions of amalgam fillings have been placed with no apparent problems. Amalgam has been used effectively, safely and cost-effectively for more than 150 years."

British Society For Mercury Free Dentistry: [www.mercuryfreedentistry.org.uk/01242\\_226918](http://www.mercuryfreedentistry.org.uk/01242_226918)