

by Traci Moore

**D**r. Steven Swidler of Medicine Wheel Dental received his Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Illinois and his dental degree (DDS) from the University of Illinois dental school in 1972. After two years in clinical and private practice in Chicago, Dr. Swidler relocated to Tucson, where he became deeply committed to holistic and integrative dental approaches. He lectures nationally and internationally on topics related to innovative dental therapies. Dr. Swidler answers Natural Awakenings' questions about alternative dentistry.



### Are there any natural alternatives to a root canal?

When a tooth becomes painful and shows early signs of dying, dentists generally either perform a root canal or extract the tooth. There is, however, an alternative treatment that involves the use of a natural, rice bran-based material. This material contains 70 natural antioxidants and calms nerve tissue. In a 12-year clinical study, the material has had a greater than 80% success rate keeping teeth living and healthy when three conditions are present: the tooth is still vital; the nerve, even if exposed, is still alive; and the anesthetic is effective in numbing the tooth.

### What is TMJ dysfunction and how is it treated?

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the jaw joint located on either side of your head, just in front of your ear. When a patient's bite is "off," the jaw may become misaligned, which can create headaches, a tight neck, a stiff or painful jaw, and even shoulder, back, hip or knee pain. An expanded bite evaluation during a dental exam can determine how a jaw/bite problem may be affecting the body's

alignment and function. With the aid of dental appliances, patients can gradually re-establish a neutral jaw position so their TM joint can heal, relieving more than 80% of overall symptoms within one to five months. Many other modalities, like one-on-one yoga, massage, and cranial osteopathy can also help eliminate strain or injury and strengthen new body movement patterns.

### Are silver fillings really a health concern?

Often mistakenly called "silver" because of their appearance, these fillings are actually amalgams, composed of 50% mercury. Mercury is the number one neurotoxin. The free ions in mercury can move through tissue and into the blood, cross the blood brain and placental barriers, and distribute mercury throughout the body. When a person with a mercury amalgam filling (no matter the age of the filling) chews food or drinks a hot beverage, a measurable

amount of mercury vapor is emitted.

If you decide to have your amalgam fillings removed, remember that mercury amalgams should be removed only with very safe protocols to prevent you from being exposed to even higher levels of mercury. Speak to your dentist about protective protocols for amalgam removal before considering this action.

### Do you recommend dental implants?

In general, dental implants are an excellent method for replacing missing teeth. However, it's important to consider that the body's white blood cells constantly fight bacteria and viruses in the blood. Because these bacteria and viruses often settle around foreign implants in the body (knees, hips, jaws, etc.), some dentists will prescribe antibiotics after dentistry in an attempt to prevent bacteria from entering the blood stream and settling around these foreign materials. Until a ceramic or other material is developed that stops unhealthy bacteria from gathering in no-circulation areas, dental implants, despite their obvious benefits, may pose a health concern.

Contact Dr. Steven Swidler at Medicine Wheel Dental: 4650 W. Jobja Drive, Tucson, Arizona 85745. Visit [medicinewheeldental.com](http://medicinewheeldental.com) or call 520-743-7101.

Traci Moore is a writer and editor who holds a BA in Studio Art/Photography from Scripps College and a Certificate in Creative Writing from Phoenix College. Her fiction and essays have appeared in numerous literary journals. For more information, visit [tracimoore.org](http://tracimoore.org).