



DENTAL FILLINGS

The most common treatment for a cavity is a dental filling. This treatment involves your dentist removing tooth decay from your tooth and filling the hole with dental material used to fill cavities. Depending on the kind of filling you've chosen, there are 2 main ways to fill a cavity:

DIRECT FILLING

These fillings are placed directly into your tooth after your dentist has cleaned out the decay. First, your dentist may give you a local anesthetic (or freezing) so you do not feel any discomfort. Your dentist will take out all of the decay from the tooth using a drill, a laser or a compressed air device. The hole is then shaped and filled. Direct materials like amalgam and composite resin harden quickly. For composite fillings, your dentist puts a bonding material (or glue) inside the cavity. Composite resin is applied in thin layers. Each layer gets hard with the help of a special light that your dentist holds over the tooth. When the last layer of the filling is hard, your dentist shapes the filling so that it looks and feels natural.

INDIRECT FILLING

These fillings are custom-made to fit your tooth. You will need at least 2 visits to the dentist for an indirect filling. During the first visit, your dentist may first give you a local anesthetic (freezing) so you don't have any discomfort. Your dentist will then remove the decay from the tooth using a drill, a laser or a compressed air device. Next, a mold of your tooth is made and the hole is filled with a temporary filling. The mold of your tooth is used to make a model. A gold or porcelain filling is then made to fit your tooth using the model. At your next appointment, your dentist removes the temporary filling and cements the new permanent filling in place.

CHOOSING THE DENTAL FILLING MATERIAL

Your dentist can suggest the kind of filling that is best for you, but the final choice is yours. Allergic reactions to dental fillings are rare. However, before any dental treatment always let your dentist know about changes to your health since your last visit:

- Are you taking any medications including herbal supplements?
- Are you undergoing medical tests?
- Have you developed allergies?
- Are you pregnant?

AMALGAM FILLINGS

These fillings are sometimes called “silver” fillings and are used to fill cavities in molars. They are a mix of metals such as mercury, silver, copper and tin.

✓ PROS

- These are the least expensive type of filling.
- They last a long time.
- They are easy to put in place.
- They are direct fillings, so they can usually be done in 1 appointment.

✗ CONS

- The silver colour may not appeal to people who want a “natural” look.
- Tiny amounts of mercury vapour are released from the filling when you chew. Health Canada concludes that although amalgam contributes detectable amounts of mercury to the body, these levels do not cause illness. Health Canada recommends alternative filling materials be considered for restoring the primary teeth (baby teeth) of children where the mechanical properties of the material are suitable. Pregnant women and people who may have allergic hypersensitivity to mercury or who have impaired kidney function should avoid amalgam fillings.

COMPOSITE RESIN FILLINGS:

Also called plastic or white fillings, this kind of filling is well suited for visible areas in your mouth. Many small fillings on back teeth are being done with composite resin.

✓ PROS

- These fillings will be the same colour as your natural teeth.
- They are direct fillings, so they can be done in 1 appointment in most cases.

✗ CONS

- These fillings are not as dependable as amalgam or gold fillings, and may not last as long.
- Recurrent decay is more of a problem than with amalgam or gold fillings.

CAST GOLD FILLINGS

These fillings are a mixture of gold and other metals such as platinum, palladium and silver to make gold fillings more durable. Pure gold is too soft and would wear away.

✓ PROS

- Gold is stronger than amalgam.
- Gold fillings last a long time.
- Many studies show these are the best fillings for durability and wear over many years.

✗ CONS

- Gold costs more than other kinds of fillings.
- Gold fillings are indirect fillings, so they take at least 2 appointments.
- The gold colour may not appeal to people who want a natural look.

PORCELAIN MATERIALS

These are the most common kind of dental ceramic used by dentists. Porcelain and metal can be combined to make a strong, tooth-coloured crown.

✓ PROS

- Dental porcelain is the same colour as natural teeth.
- These fillings often last a long time.

✗ CONS

- For teeth that bite down hard, like molars, ceramics may not be a good choice unless combined with a metallic structure. They are more brittle and can break or chip.
- They are indirect fillings, so at least 2 appointments will be needed.

GLASS IONOMER MATERIALS

These fillings are only used in places on the teeth where you do not bite down hard such as at the gum line. Glass ionomer materials are becoming more popular with patients who have high amounts of tooth decay and with elderly people who have problems brushing or have dry mouth as a side effect of their medications.

✓ PROS

- These fillings are the same colour as your natural teeth.
- They contain fluoride, which helps stop recurrent decay in the tooth.
- They do not have to be put in layer by layer. This makes it simpler than putting in composite resins.
- They are direct fillings and can usually be done in 1 appointment.

✗ CONS

- They are not as strong and may not last as long as other fillings.