

Restoring your smile: dental filling and crown options

Today, you and your dentist have several choices for repairing decayed or damaged teeth.

Left untreated, dental cavities (holes in your teeth caused by tooth decay) can lead to pain, tooth loss or infection. They can also change your smile. Thanks to modern advances in dental materials and techniques, dentists have many ways to restore the natural shape of decayed or damaged teeth. This means you can enjoy a natural-looking, healthy smile even if you've had cavities.

The repair method your dentist recommends for you will depend on how many teeth need to be fixed, where they're located in your mouth, and how much of each tooth needs to be restored. The chart^{1,2} below compares the most common materials dentists use to repair decayed or damaged teeth.



MATERIAL	CONTENTS	USES	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Fillings ("direct restorations"): You can typically get a filling placed in a single visit. First, the dentist prepares the tooth (by removing the damaged tooth material and re-shaping the cavity so the filling will fit securely). Then, the dentist places the filling material into the tooth and adjusts it as needed.				
Amalgam	Made of an alloy (metal mixture) of mercury, silver, tin and copper	Fillings of all sizes; typically used on back teeth	Relatively inexpensive and easy to place; amalgams can last many years	Silver color is not natural-looking; your dentist may need to remove more natural tooth than with composites
Composite	A mixture of glass or quartz in a plastic-like substance called "resin"	Fillings of all sizes on front teeth; small- to mid-sized fillings on back teeth; also used for some veneers	Tooth-colored; less natural tooth is removed than with amalgams	Composites typically cost more than amalgams ³ and take longer to place; the treated area may be sensitive to hot or cold
Inlays, onlays, veneers, crowns or fixed bridges ("indirect restorations"): These more complex restorations may require two or more visits to complete. First, the dentist prepares the tooth and makes an impression of the area to be restored. Next, the dentist sends the impression to a dental laboratory, which creates the restoration. Finally, the dentist places the restoration in your mouth and adjusts it as needed.				
Porcelain	Porcelain, ceramic or glasslike material	Inlays, onlays, veneers or crowns; used for front or back teeth	Can look like natural teeth; won't wear out from regular chewing	Grinding or clenching may cause a porcelain restoration to crack, or to wear an opposing natural tooth (the tooth above or below); higher cost than direct fillings
Porcelain fused to metal	Porcelain attached (bonded) to a supporting metal structure	Crowns and fixed bridges; used for front or back teeth	Can look like natural teeth; generally stronger than porcelain-only restorations	Grinding or clenching may cause these restorations to crack, or to wear an opposing natural tooth (the tooth above or below); higher cost than direct fillings
Base, Noble, and High Noble Metals	Base metals contain less than 25% gold, palladium, and/or platinum; "Noble" and "High Noble" metals contain 25% or more gold, palladium and/or platinum	Full metal crowns, fixed bridges, inlays and onlays; typically used for back teeth	Restorations involving these metals are solid and durable, and are less likely to wear opposing teeth (teeth above or below) than porcelain	Metal color is not natural-looking; higher cost than direct fillings

Before you begin treatment, talk with your dentist to find out which restoration is right for you.



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