

# Tooth coloured fillings

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*Many patients prefer  
the aesthetics of  
white fillings when  
they smile or laugh*

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## What are white fillings?

A composite or white filling is a tooth-coloured plastic and glass mixture used to restore decayed teeth. These fillings are also used cosmetically to improve your smile by changing the colour of your teeth or reshaping disfigured teeth. They stick to the enamel of your teeth.

After the tooth is prepared, we will first etch your tooth with a weak acid gel and then after applying special glues, will place the composite in layers, using a visible blue light to harden each layer. The composite is then shaped to fit the tooth and polished to prevent staining.



## What are the advantages and disadvantages of white fillings?

The main advantage of composites is aesthetics since we can place fillings nearly identical in colour to the tooth. However, they can take up stain and will wear out sooner than silver fillings, particularly in larger cavities, but do well in small cavities. Composites are usually more expensive than silver fillings and will need replacing on average every 5-6 years.

## Dental amalgam (silver fillings). Is it safe?

Dental amalgam is a mixture of silver, tin, copper and mercury. Mercury is used to bind the metals together forming an alloy which provides a strong, hard and durable filling. Mercury is the only element that will bind these metals together so that they can be manipulated into a tooth cavity. When bound up with the other metals in

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*There is no evidence  
that mercury in dental  
amalgam is dangerous  
to health*

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dental amalgam its chemical nature changes, so it is essentially harmless. The amount of mercury released in the mouth under normal wear is extremely small and less than what patients are exposed to in food and water. One recent study showed that mercury from fillings makes up less than 1% of your total mercury intake. The rest is likely to come from our diet.

Ongoing scientific studies over the past 100 years have proved that amalgam is not harmful. Claims of diseases caused by mercury in amalgam are anecdotal, as are claims of miraculous cures achieved by removing amalgam. These claims have not been proved scientifically.

## **Why do we still use amalgam?**

After over 150 years of use, amalgam is still one of the safest, most durable and least expensive materials used to fill teeth. Amalgam fillings can last over 20 years.

However, amalgam does not 'stick' to teeth which is why white fillings may be offered in larger cavities and also cosmetically on front teeth. Patients may also prefer the aesthetics of white fillings when they smile or laugh.

## **Are there alternatives to composite or amalgam fillings?**

There are alternatives to amalgam and composite such as cast gold or porcelain restorations, but they are considerably more expensive and take longer to make as they involve laboratory construction. Porcelain restorations are not as durable (they can fracture) and can sometimes wear opposing teeth.

Speak to us if you would like to know more.