



RESTORING YOUR TEETH AND SMILE

An at-a-glance view of today's dental restoration methods.

Dental cavities are holes in your teeth caused by tooth decay. They can lead to pain, tooth loss or infection – not to mention an unsightly smile. Thankfully, dentists have many ways to treat and restore decayed or damaged teeth, so you can restore a healthy smile even if you've had cavities.

The following charts compare the most common materials dentists use to repair decayed or damaged teeth.

Fillings*

Fillings are usually placed in a single visit. First, the dentist prepares the tooth by removing the damaged tooth structure and re-shaping the remaining healthy tooth structure so the filling will fit securely. Then, the dentist places the filling material into the tooth and adjusts it as needed.

MATERIAL	CONTENTS	USES	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
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 and take longer to place; the treated area may be sensitive to hot or cold

Together, all the way.®



Inlays, onlays, veneers, crowns or fixed bridges**

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 lab, which creates the restoration. Finally, the dentist places the restoration in your mouth and adjusts it as needed.

MATERIAL	CONTENTS	USES	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Porcelain	Porcelain, ceramic or glass-like 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 the restoration to crack, or to wear 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 the restoration to crack, or to wear 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



Which method is right for you?

Your dentist will recommend a method depending 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. Be sure to have an open discussion with your dentist about any questions or concerns you might have, so you can both feel confident in the final decision.



* U.S. Food and Drug Administration. "About Dental Amalgam Fillings," December 2017. <<https://www.fda.gov/MedicalDevices/ProductsandMedicalProcedures/DentalProducts/DentalAmalgam/ucm171094.htm>>

** American Dental Association. "Comparison of Indirect Restorative Dental Materials", accessed October 2018. <<http://www.ada.org/~media/ADA/Member%20Center/Files/materials.ashx>>

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