



# Direct Fillings: Amalgam

## What it is:

Dental amalgam is a stable alloy made by combining mercury, silver, tin, copper and sometimes other metallic elements. Amalgam fillings can be placed in one appointment.



## Why you would get it:

Amalgam is most often used to fill a cavity that isn't visible to others, such as in the back molars. Amalgams are typically less expensive and easier to place than composite (tooth-colored) fillings. They are usually more durable to chewing pressure when a large filling is needed.

## How it works:

### Step 1

After numbing the area, your dentist will clean away the decayed enamel with a high-speed drill or laser system. For detail work, a slower drill or a manual scooping tool may also be used.



Decaying tooth

### Step 2

Once the decay has been removed, your dentist will cut the hole into a shape that allows the filling to stay in your tooth while letting you chew properly. If your cavity is exceptionally large or deep, your dentist may coat the inside of the tooth with a lining that helps prevent tooth sensitivity and seals against leakage.



Decay removed

### Step 3

The hole is filled with the amalgam. Before the amalgam hardens, your dentist will carve it to fit the curves and contours of your tooth.



Filling with amalgam material

### Step 4

Your dentist will check your bite and adjust the filling, if needed, to make sure the new tooth surface is comfortable in your mouth.



If you have any questions about what your dental plan covers, talk with your dentist or visit [deltadentalco.com](http://deltadentalco.com) and sign in to view your benefits information.



# Direct Fillings: Composite

## What it is:

A composite filling, also called a plastic or tooth-colored filling, is made of tooth-colored resins. It is durable, resistant to fractures and blends in well with natural teeth. Placing a composite filling is more time-intensive than placing an amalgam, so composites are typically more expensive. Because they're tooth-colored, and amalgams are good functional alternatives for molar teeth, composites are sometimes considered a cosmetic procedure and may not be covered by insurance at the same level as amalgam. Composite fillings can be placed in one appointment.



## Why you would get it:

The tooth color of a composite filling makes it a good fit for cavities that are in noticeable places such as front teeth. Composites can also work well in molar teeth but may not be as durable when large fillings are needed in heavy chewing areas.

## How it works:

### Step 1

The area will be numbed and the decay will be cleaned out. The area must remain extremely dry, so a suction tool is used to remove saliva during the procedure.



Decaying tooth



Decay removed

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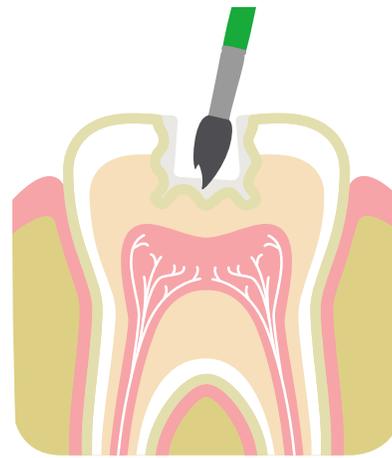
## How it works (continued):



**Roughened tooth**

### Step 2

Your dentist will etch (roughen) the inside of the prepared tooth with a weak acid (similar to the acid in soda) to help the composite filling stick.



**Thin bonding material**

### Step 3

The roughened surface will be coated with a thin bonding material.



**Filling with composite material**

### Step 4

The hole will be filled with a composite material, which bonds directly to your tooth.



**Hardening filling**

### Step 5

Your dentist will use a special light to cure (harden) the composite material. If the hole is particularly deep, the dentist may repeat step 4 and step 5 to apply the composite in layers.

### Step 6

Your dentist will check your bite to ensure the new filling feels comfortable. You may have to bite down on carbon paper, which leaves behind colored marks to help your dentist see where the filling is too high. He or she will smooth out any rough or high spots before you leave.



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# Indirect Fillings: Crowns

## What it is:

A crown, also known as a cap, is used to repair a broken or extremely weak tooth. It can also protect a tooth that has undergone a root canal or is used as an anchor for a fixed bridge. Crowns are often made of cast gold, other metals, and porcelain fused to metal or ceramics. These materials hold up well to the wear and tear of chewing. A crown takes multiple appointments to place.

## Why you would get one:

Because it can cover more surface area, a crown is typically used for a larger cavity.

## How it works:



Decaying tooth



Grinding of soft tissue



Temporary crown



Permanent crown

### Step 1

After you're seated in the dental chair, your dentist will numb the area and remove the decay from the tooth.

### Step 2

Next, your dentist grinds the soft tissue (dentin) inside the tooth into a peg-like shape. Your dentist will use a putty-like material to take an impression of your tooth so the permanent crown can be custom-made at a dental lab. This can take up to three weeks.

### Step 3

In the meantime, a temporary crown, usually made of acrylic or other plastic, will be attached to protect your tooth.

### Step 4

At the second visit, your dentist will remove the temporary crown and check the fit of your new permanent crown. If everything looks and feels correct, your dentist will attach the permanent crown with dental cement.



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# Indirect Fillings: Inlay/Onlay

## What it is:

Instead of covering the entire chewing surface and sides of a damaged tooth like a crown does, an inlay or onlay only covers portions of the tooth. Generally, both of these options allow your dentist to keep more of your natural tooth compared to a crown or other fillings. An inlay fits into the contours of a tooth, while an onlay is larger and usually covers most of the tooth's chewing surfaces, but not all of the sides. Inlays and onlays are typically made of gold or a ceramic material, which are more durable long term than either amalgam or composite. Inlays and onlays require multiple appointments to place.

## Why you would get one:

Your dentist may suggest inlays or onlays as a high-quality and potentially longer-lasting alternative to amalgam and composite. (Keep in mind that they're also more expensive.) In particular, onlays may be used if your cavity is too large to support a regular filling, but there is enough healthy tooth that you don't need a full crown. For this reason inlays and onlays are sometimes called "partial crowns."



Inlay



Onlay

Continued on the next page.

## How it works:

### DIRECT INLAY OR ONLAY

#### Step 1

As with other fillings, your mouth will be numbed topically and locally.

#### Step 2

Your dentist will use a drill to remove the decay.

#### Step 3

The composite resin will be placed on the tooth. It's then molded to fit the tooth, removed and hardened in a special oven, all in your dentist's office. The office may also be equipped with a computer-assisted milling machine that can take an impression of the tooth and prepare a block of ceramic into the final restoration during a single appointment.

#### Step 4

Your dentist will cement the custom filling to your tooth and polish it.

#### Step 5

After it's placed, the filling may need to be shaped using special shaping and polishing bits for the high-speed dental drill. This is a painless process and requires no anesthetic.

### INDIRECT INLAY OR ONLAY

#### Step 1

As with the direct inlay or onlay, your mouth will be numbed and decay will be removed with a drill.

#### Step 2

Your dentist will take an impression of the prepared tooth and send it to a laboratory for a custom fit, similar to the crown process.

#### Step 3

Your dentist will give the tooth a temporary filling in this first appointment.

#### Step 4

When the custom filling arrives, the placement process is the same as with a direct inlay or onlay.



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