

Composite (White) Fillings

About the proposed treatment

White or composite fillings for back teeth are a relatively new filling choice for dental patients. Unlike silver or amalgam fillings that have been used for over 100 years, composite fillings use the latest in adhesion technology. Because of this, they seal your cavity and bond to your teeth. With silver fillings the expansion during hardening that occurs and the preparation of the cavity (drilling) holds the filling in place. This preparation is usually to undercut the cavity to lock the filling in place. Because of this, silver fillings usually results in restorations that are larger than the actual cavity. Conversely, white fillings can be approximately the same size as the cavity. Of course, for white fillings replacing already existing silver fillings, the new filling will approximate the size of the original silver filling.

After the decay and/or old silver filling is removed, the cavity is cleansed and a mild acidic solution is placed into the cavity. This is rinsed out and a bonding agent or sealant is placed. This sealant as well as the subsequent filling material is hardened or cured with a bright blue light. The light is harmless but if you stare into the light for an extended time, it could potentially damage your eyes. For this reason, patients are asked to close their eyes during the filling procedure. As the light only penetrates about 2 mm, the cavity is filled in sequential increments, each to be cured with exposure to the light.

After the filling is placed, the bite is checked to make sure you are biting correctly. Since the composite is harder than your natural tooth, biting too heavily on just the filling will cause your tooth to become sensitive to biting pressure and/or cold temperatures. Most corrections can be made at the end of your appointment. Occasionally patients may be so numb from the anesthesia that their bite will change after the anesthesia wears off. If you are experiencing any symptoms, you must notify the dental office so that an appointment can be made to have your bite adjusted.

Benefits and alternatives

Composite or white fillings, because they are bonded to tooth structure, seal the cavity from bacteria, plaque, and oral fluids. Their color helps them blend in with your other teeth and make them look natural. Other similar filling materials include porcelain and cured-resin inlays and onlays. These other types of fillings are also white but may require more preparation and removal than composite fillings. Additionally, they tend to require multiple appointments. In addition, preparation for these fillings require more tooth removal than composite fillings. The most common alternative is the use of amalgam or silver fillings. Because silver fillings have mercury compounds, many patients prefer to have no silver fillings in their mouth. It should be noted however that there has yet to be any scientific studies that prove the existence of mercury or mercury compounds in silver fillings to cause any side effects in patients.

Common risks

1. Bleeding, pain, soreness, and infection: During and after treatment you may experience bleeding, pain, swelling or discomfort for several days, which may be treated with pain medication. You may also experience an infection following treatment, which would be treated with antibiotics.

