



Got a cavity? You have options.

Did you know that even with modern advances in dental care—like the use of fluoride—about 92% of adults in the U.S. have cavities?¹ If you need a cavity filled, you may have options—depending on the size of the cavity and its location.

Amalgam fillings

Many people are familiar with amalgam fillings or “silver fillings” that have been used by dentists for over 150 years. They are made up of mostly mercury along with other metals such as silver, copper and tin.²

Composite fillings

Introduced in the 1970s, composite fillings have improved with technology over the last 10 years. These fillings are sometimes called “white fillings” and are a mixture of acrylic resin and powdered glass or quartz.³

Learning the differences

If you have a small to mid-sized cavity, or a front tooth is affected, using a composite/white filling is often the best choice. However, there are some pros and cons to consider when deciding between an amalgam and a composite filling.⁴

The best way to avoid a filling is to prevent the cavity in the first place.

Remember, good oral hygiene is your best defense against tooth decay. This includes brushing with fluoride toothpaste before bed, flossing daily, regular dental visits (at least annually) and limiting sugary drinks.

Filling Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Amalgam (silver filling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Good for back teeth, can take high-pressure grinding and chewing ■ Durable and long lasting (average life is about 12 years) ■ Most researched method 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ May darken over time, giving teeth a gray appearance ■ Does not match tooth color ■ Prone to cracks/fractures because material expands and contracts
Composite (white filling)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Chemically bonds to tooth enamel, provides further support against breakage ■ Less drilling needed, more preservation of the healthy part of the tooth ■ Low risk of leakage when only bonded to enamel ■ Close match to color of the tooth, which may be more appealing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Average life is about 8 years—may need to be replaced more often than metal fillings. This could result in the loss of healthy tooth structure. ■ Can be difficult to put into place ■ More expensive than silver amalgam

Making a decision

Be informed and talk to your dentist to see which filling type he/she thinks is best for your needs—and your tooth. You should also check with your insurance company to see what’s covered. CareFirst dental plans include composite fillings as a standard feature, setting us apart from other carriers. So with CareFirst, deciding between an amalgam and composite filling is up to you and your dentist.

¹ National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research. Dental Caries in Adults. Accessed April 18, 2014 at: <http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/DataStatistics/FindDataByTopic/DentalCaries/DentalCariesAdults20to64.htm>.

² Dentistry.com. Amalgam vs. Composite Fillings. Accessed April 18, 2014 at: <http://www.dentistry.com/treatments/dental-fillings/amalgam-vs-composite-fillings>.

³ Infinity Dental Web, Inc. White Composite Fillings Versus Silver Amalgam Fillings. Accessed April 18, 2014 at: http://www.mynewsmile.com/amalgam_fillings.htm.

⁴ WebMD. Dental Health and Tooth Fillings. Accessed April 18, 2014 at: <http://www.webmd.com/oral-health/guide/dental-health-fillings?page=2>.